

Jeansdinge: Focus on a Collection / archive of 450 denim objects (*denimeries*)

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Petitioning Institution
HEAD–Genève (HES-SO)

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The Jeansdinge Project was conceived by Katharina Hohmann, an artist and professor at HEAD–Genève, and Katharina Tietze, a designer and professor at ZHdK. Jeansdinge (“denim things”) explores our relationship with denim through a curated collection of 450 objects. This research and creative project provides a look back between the visual arts and fashion that is both fascinating and disturbing.

*“There is no other material that is as evocative as denim.
No other textile iconography is as eloquent and universal.”*
— Katharina Hohmann



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The Origin of the Project: The Jeansdinge Collection

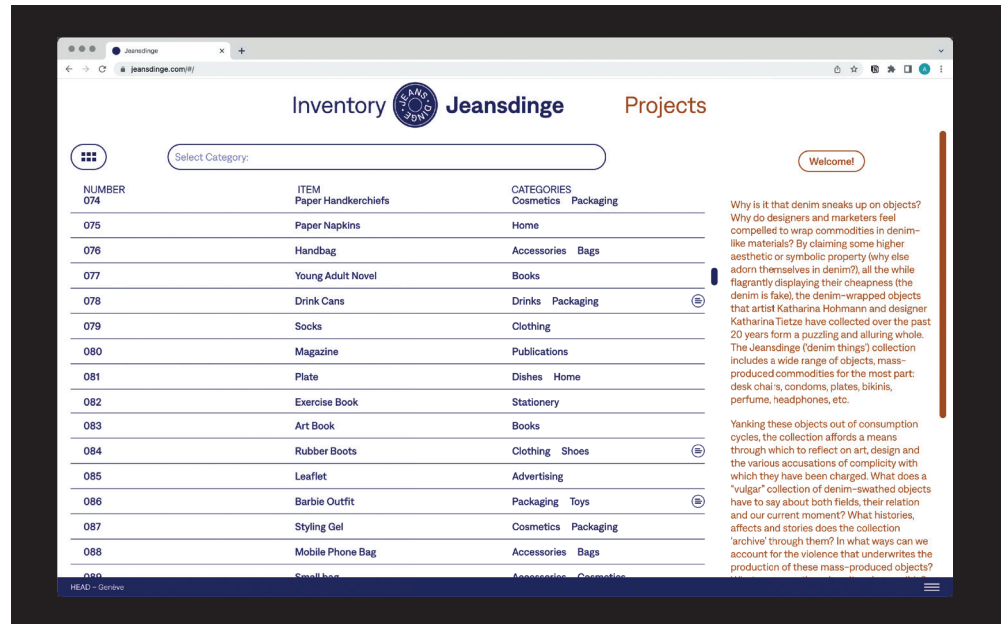
When one mentions denim, it immediately brings to mind jeans and similar items that are part of everyday life. However, in this collection, you will only find a few articles of clothing. The Jeansdinge collection began in 2002 with a humble car deodoriser, dubbed “Wunderbaum”. Twenty years later, the collection-archive now numbers over 450 objects either made with denim (*denimeries*), or covered by a material that imitates it.

The Jeansdinge Collection represents a type of non-hierarchical, alternative memoir which is not officially considered to be an archive. Nevertheless, according to the concept of the “anarchive”, they are significant throughout a large part of the world.¹ Removed from the cycle of consumerism, these denim objects offer new areas of research and artistic creation.

From the first exhibition of objects in denim in a former GDR newspaper kiosk in 2002, to the creation of a dedicated website in 2023, artist Katharina Hohmann (HEAD), designer and professor Katharina Tietze (Zurich University of the Arts, ZHdK), fashion theorist Aude Fellay (HEAD), along with fashion designers and researchers Lorelei Regamey (HEAD) and Chaïm Vischel (HEAD) pursued this project through an exploration of the following question: can bringing together a collection of common objects (the *Jeansdinge*) according to a variety of criteria (spatial, filmic, etc.), yield new interpretations of the iconic material that is denim?²

Throughout the project, the objects were at placed at the disposal of the research team, along with artists from several fields. They were then exhibited and discussed over the course of a symposium before being “activated” using a variety of approaches. These included the creation of an inventory, the publication of a book, a series of articles, and a film archive. Today all of these contributions are available on the project's website: www.jeansdinge.com

1 See Lorelei Regamey's lecture “Opening the Anarchive”, given during the symposium *Jeansdinge on the Move*, HEAD–Genève, 18 March, 2022, www.jeansdinge.com/#/projects/symposium/session-1
2 See the series of installations at the K&K–Center for Art and Fashion, Weimar by Katharina Hohmann and Katharina Tietze, 2002–2007.



The Website: An Active Archive

More than a simple showcase, the website is a tool for researchers, artists and designers, as well as a fun and pertinent source of information for anyone who wishes to discover denim in all its shades and states. Designed by graphic designers Rob van Leijsen, Sonia Dominguez, and developer Nicolas Baldran, it is made up of two parts that mirror each other: the “inventory” and “projects”.

The inventory, the cornerstone of the collection, features 450 objects that comprise the constantly evolving collection in real time, a singular database that is freely accessible. Each object can be examined using a zoom function: when you click on the image of an item, it automatically zooms in, enabling the viewer to fully appreciate its texture and characteristics. This immersive experience is completed by a detailed description of the *Jeansdinge*, along with a creative short film of the “activation” of the item by a given artist, who has a creative carte blanche. To this date, approximately fifty short films have already been completed.

As for the project section, it includes the symposium's video archives, shorts by artists and students of the visual arts (HEAD), and design (ZHdK), who have created performances featuring the *Jeansdinge* as actual protagonists, as well as a selection of articles related to the collection and an overview of the four exhibitions that the project has currently created. All of this material enables one to perceive the evolution of an approach that began with an interaction between the Jeansdinge archive and a public space (Katharina Hohmann and Katharina Tietze's series of installations at the K&K Center for Art and Fashion, Weimar, 2002–2007). The project then went on progressively to take the form of a more direct dialogue between the objects and the various actors/actresses involved in the project through texts, publications, symposia, and film archives.

Through donations and fundraising, the collection has developed in an organic manner, as has the Jeansdinge website, which serves as an interactive archive that expresses the constantly evolving identity of the project, one which invites us to become a part of it all.



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A Collaborative Event Melding Research and Design

The scenography of the *Jeansdinge on the Move* symposium, held at the HEAD on March 18, 2022, brought to mind the concept of Bruno Latour's "talking objects", according to which objects are considered to be social actors in and of themselves, entities that have the capacity of influencing our interactions and engendering new dialogues. Here, these *denimeries* have been the object of both research and creative endeavours. They are physically at the heart of each intervention, which also attests to their narrative potential and their role in the evolution of denim as an iconic signifier in our societies.

Among the many interventions, some stand out:

Dean of Research (HEAD) Anthony Masure's lecture *Du Denimérique* posits a parallel between the proliferation of denim and that of digital technologies in our daily lives, and examines the means at our disposal with which we can gain awareness of this protean contagion over the long term.

Archivist (Zürich Museum of Design) Denise Locher's lecture *Wrapped in Textiles–Packaging* examines the relationship between surface and content. Her research is based upon a selection of objects from the Zürich Museum of Design's collection. Artist Ali Kazma's film *Screening of Jean Factory* notably highlights the toxicity of denim's production process, both for the workers and the environment. The artist, who works between Istanbul and Paris, questions our methods of consumption. Tietze headed up the Trends & Identity programme (ZHdK) and her lecture, entitled *East Berlin, 1976: A Denim Jacket for the Palace of the Republic* shows how denim became an iconic fashion statement in the 1970s, transcending social and cultural spheres. Professor (Design and Fashion, HEAD) Elizabeth Fischer's lecture *The Gender of Jeans from Menswear to Normcore* calls into question the perceptions according to which jeans seem to have become genderless. Geneva writer and graphic designer Celeste Hay's lecture *Denim Land* explores the concept of the black cowboy. Fashion theorist (HEAD) Aude Fellay's lecture *Jeansdinge: the Cute and Vulgar* studies objects in denim through the prism of Sianne Ngai's book, *Theory of the Gimmick: Aesthetic Judgment and Capitalist Form*. Artist Ernestyna Orłowska's performance *Undestroyable Denim*

views denim through its natural destruction on the human body. Artist and professor (HEAD) Ambroise Tièche's lecture *Comments on Record Covers and Other Musicalia from the Collection and Elsewhere* offers a brief overview of the ways in which denim was used by the music industry over the last five decades in order to communicate feelings of strength, durability, eroticism, rebellion and issues of power and autonomy. The symposium was concluded with DJ Anita Kirppis (Natalia Comandari), who proposed a mix created from CDs and records belonging to the Jeandinge collection.

A video recording of the six thematic sessions: Denim Everything as Prompt, All Over, Denim Politics, Denim Trouble, Art in Denim and The Sound of Denim—is available on the project's website, along with a selection of texts relating to the lectures and performances.

A Corpus of Polysemous Texts

A publication on the collection, entitled *Denimpop: Jeansdinge Lesen* (“Denimpop: Getting a Reading on Denim”) was published in 2013.³ Through a series of texts, eighteen authors from various fields (philosophy, design theory, art and media, music DJ, archaeology, comparative literature, etc.) “lend a voice” to the objects in the collection.

Other elements constantly enrich the project. Katharina Hohmann's text *Writing Jeansdinge: Approach to a Collection* reviews the issues raised and contexts of the project. Katharina Tietze's work *An Ugly Coffee Pot: Drinking from Jeans?* uses the Jeansdinge to explore the concept of “ugly” design. Professor (King's College, London) Mercedes Bunz's article *Out of the Blue* analyses the film of the same name through the denim outfits worn by the actors.

The Tale of a Film Archive as a Work in Progress

What happens when objects replace film actors? In the context of the symposium, artists, filmmakers, designers and students from HEAD and ZHdK each chose an object of their choice from the Jeansdinge collection to feature in a film. The result? Around fifty short art films where *denimeries* become veritable protagonists capable of transcending their original purpose in order to convey a reflection, an idea, or an emotion.

This filmic archive, in construction since 2022, addresses both the issues raised by this research and design project and the growing interest in a living, evolving collection, rather than one that is static and immutable. New contributions are regularly added to enrich the film archive as well as the collection of denim objects, thus contributing to reinforcing the organic and evolutive nature of the project.

3 Katharina Hohmann, *Denimpop: Jeansdinge Lesen*, Berlin, Merlav, 2013.



Project Curators

After earning an MFA from the Berlin University of the Arts, **Katharina Hohmann** taught at several German and European art schools. She cofounded the Visual Arts Master's programme *Public Art and New Artistic Strategies* (Bauhaus-Universität Weimar, 2001) and the Work.Master programme (HEAD–Geneva, HES-SO, 2008). Since 2007, Hohmann has been Director of the Construction of the Bachelor's in the Visual Arts program at HEAD. Her artistic œuvre has been featured in numerous solo and group exhibitions, where she has been both contributing artist and curator. Permanent and ephemeral works in public spaces are an important part of her artistic practice.

Katharina Tietze studied fashion design at the Berlin University of the Arts. She went on to become a costume designer at the Theaterhaus Jena from 1999 to 2005, and worked at the “Fashion and Public Appearance” department at the Bauhaus-Universität Weimar. She has directed several colloquia and other works about style and the culture of the everyday. She is currently a professor at the Zurich University of the Arts, and is Director of the Trends & Identity section.