

SWISS INSTITUTE / CONTEMPORARY ART  
495 BROADWAY / 3<sup>RD</sup> FLOOR  
NEW YORK / NY 10012  
TEL 212.925.2035  
WWW.SWISSINSTITUTE.NET

SI

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By Roberta Smith

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Front Row

*Eric Wilson*

# Haunting Images Of Denim

THE publication in 2000 of a monograph that showcased the work of the Swiss photographer Karlheinz Weinberger — gritty images of Zurich teenagers who appropriated the look of the American rebel with intricately customized jeans and denim jackets — became something of a fetish for fashion designers.

Steven Meisel fashioned a Versace Jeans campaign after the style, and Martin Margiela showed oversize belt buckles like those seen in the photographs, many of which were festooned with images of Elvis Presley. But Mr. Weinberger and his art have remained on the fringe of the broader cultural consciousness, a status his supporters are hoping will improve this month with the publication of a second monograph by Rizzoli, called "Rebel Youth," and two exhibitions opening next week in Manhattan.

Mr. Weinberger's subjects, mostly young men photographed in the '50s and '60s, interpreted American style in ways both fascinating and bizarre. The zippers of their jeans were ripped out of the crotch and replaced by crudely placed chains, corseted laces or, in one instance, nuts and bolts. It was a look so incongruous that John Waters begins an essay in the new book asking, "Karlheinz Weinberger was from Switzerland??! You gotta be kidding me."

The first exhibition, opening Wednesday at the Swiss Institute at 495 Broadway, will present an overview of Mr. Weinberger's work along with some of the jackets and jeans seen in the images. A second show, opening Feb. 11 at the Anna Kustera Gallery at 520 West 21st Street, will include posthumously printed color images, which are being shown publicly for the first time.

Also opening just in time for New York Fashion Week, on Feb. 10 at the Dorian Grey Gallery at 437 East Ninth Street, is a show of sketches and drawings by the designer Stephen Sprouse from 1974 to 1988. Mr. Sprouse, who died in 2004, was known for his pop and punk sensibility and his association with singers like Debbie Harry and Patti Smith. They appear frequently as subjects in the sketches, alongside notations that offer a vivid window into Mr. Sprouse's thinking as he started in fashion.

One includes a to-do list written in the margins. "Give Mary McFadden portrait," it begins. "To be able to afford NYC, to become self-sufficient, to live with someone."



ESTATE OF KARLHEINZ WEINBERGER  
VIA ARTIST RESOURCES MANAGEMENT, NEW YORK

**MUSE** Karlheinz Weinberger's  
photos have influenced designers.