



69 DÉJÀ VU 69 DÉJÀ VU 69 DÉJÀ VU 69 DÉJÀ VU 69 DÉJÀ VU

69 Life

The lifestyle brand 69 is the brainchild of an anonymous Los Angeles-based designer whose non-gender- and non-demographic-specific clothing embraces ideas of freedom, inclusivity, and a more fluid future. Since its founding in 2011, the brand has developed a cult following for its playful and exaggerated attire. With a strong focus on transforming everyday denim into strikingly elegant garments that resist easy categorization, 69 welcomes people of all ages, races, sexualities, and sizes into its community. For its first solo exhibition at a museum, 69 presents a survey of its groundbreaking clothing along with a selection of irreverent and inventive videos and photographs that blur the line between promotional material and artwork.

69's name gives a nod to the titillation of erotic play while referencing the designer's astrological sign, Cancer. The universality of astrological signs (everyone has one) and the particular reversibility of Cancer's graphic symbol ☿ make for an apt logo, suitable to designs that are resolutely unfixed in terms of where, how, and by whom they might be worn. Likewise, denim is omnipresent; it is worn around the globe and embraced for its durability and comfortable, casual feel. In the language of 69's garments, oversize

is often the right size, and the body may be excessively draped to suggest a faux-modesty that actually highlights the attractiveness of the human form.

The clothing, videos, and Instagram feed* of 69 convey the brand's seductive and unequivocally gleeful sense of the ways in which clothes enable us to move for and with each other. The *Cocoon Dress* (fig. 1), for instance, may appear fully enveloping, but in motion its numerous folds open up to reveal the wearer's body underneath. *Front Flap Jeans* wrap and conceal the hips and crotch; should the wearer decide, like a flasher, to open the flaps, another layer of jeans is disclosed (a hilariously anticlimactic maneuver captured in one of 69's many short Instagram videos). In the collection video *69 • Spring Summer 2016* (fig. 2), a motley crew boogies down the runway *Soul Train*-style, displaying commonality through clothing despite many different forms of expressivity. The same ethos infects the brand's most high-profile cameo to date, a scene in Beyoncé's 2016 music video for the song "Formation," in which 69-clad dancers flank the superstar—unified by denim but emphatically individual in their sartorial details.

*69's Instagram feed can be found at www.instagram.com/69us.

69 self-identifies as non-demographic and its promotional campaigns typically feature diverse individuals who are appealing in their undeniable exuberance (they include, for example, older models). To counter the fashion industry's emphasis on faces, 69 has at times covered models' heads in charmingly shaggy *Fringe Masks* or *Sunblock Hats* (fig. 3) that leave only the eyes exposed. Sometimes more questions are raised than answered by a flash of skin. *Butt Void* and *Tit Void* (fig. 4) are generously draped garments with removable panels over their eponymous body parts—they highlight just how much of the wearer's body is covered. The *Baps Button Up* (fig. 5) shirt takes the opposite approach, with a panel of flat and loose fabric attached to its front, suggesting the breast as an appendage that can, in the game that is getting dressed up, be taken on or off at whim. Especially in a time of increased and urgent visibility for trans, nonbinary, and gender nonconforming people, the politics of 69's clothing speak to the radical transformation of our understanding of who we are and how we are shaped by gender as well as race, class, and age.

Lifestyle brands are companies whose marketing aims to reflect and embody the aspirations, attitudes,

and beliefs of particular groups; a brand creates an affiliation between its products or services and the intended consumer's way of life. The promotional materials of 69 recall ideals of creativity, self-expression, and inclusion promoted in the 1980s by corporate entities such as Apple and Benetton. However, 69's open-ended and anonymous approach suggests a mode of consumption that is less about the lone individual or a defined demographic and more about a diverse collectivity engaged in new forms of playing, moving, and being together.

Lanka Tattersall
Associate Curator



Left to right:
Figure 1. 69, *Cocoon Dress*, 2012, denim, dimensions variable. Courtesy of the designer. Photo by Bennet Perez
Figure 2. 69, *69 • Spring Summer 2016*, 2016, video (color, sound), 1:38 minutes




From left to right:
Figure 3. 69, *Sunblock Hats*, 2014, denim, dimensions variable. Courtesy of the designer. Photo by Bennet Perez
Figure 4. 69, *Tit Void*, 2016, denim, dimensions variable. Courtesy of the designer. Photo by Indah Datau
Figure 5. 69, *Baps Button Up*, 2016, denim, dimensions variable. Courtesy of the designer. Photo by Indah Datau

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Related Programs:

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Cover image: *69, Fringe Mask*, 2015, denim, dimensions variable. Courtesy of the designer. Photo by Anthony Espino

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