

# YOUTHQUAKE!

THE 1960s FASHION REVOLUTION

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PHOTO BY SHANNON SINCLAIR

**Betsey Johnson** began her phenomenally successful career in the 1960s, when she established herself as a leader in the youthquake fashion revolution. The clothing that Johnson designed for New York's cutting-edge Paraphernalia boutique featured experimental materials such as vinyl and foil. 1960s style icons including Twiggy, Edie Sedgwick, and Penelope Tree admired and wore the designer's daring minidresses. Johnson started her own line in 1978, and she continues to create playful and youthfully exuberant clothing today.

Tracy Jenkins and Cassidy Zachary, graduate student curators of the exhibition ***Youthquake! The 1960s Fashion Revolution*** at the Museum at FIT, are thrilled to present this exclusive interview with Betsey Johnson.

**Tracy Jenkins and Cassidy Zachary:** *Much of today's fashion is youth-oriented, but that was a new concept when you became a fashion designer in the 1960s. What was it like being part of a revolution in fashion that was both for and by young people?*

**Betsey Johnson:** A ONCE AND A LIFETIME THRILL BECAUSE I WAS 21 AND DOING MY OWN THING. THE YOUTHQUAKE, 60'S GENERATION WILL ALWAYS BE THE BEST CHUNK OF TIME OF MY WORK LIFE.

**TJ and CZ:** *In numerous articles from the sixties, you were referred to as an avant-garde designer for your experimentations with new and unorthodox materials. An image of your "Glue-It-Yourself" dress of 1966 is featured in the exhibition. What inspired you to use such innovative materials in your designs?*

**BJ:** THE 60'S REPRESENTED SUPER MODERN, SUPER FUTURE, SUPER CONCEPTUAL PLASTICS AND NEONS AND PAPER AND INVENTIVE FABRICATIONS. THAT TIME ZONE WAS THE MOST TRIPPY, FLIPPY MODERN ERA. ANYTHING NEW WAS THE REAL DEAL OF EXCITEMENT- LANDING ON THE MOON, PANTYHOSE AND THINGS LIKE THAT.

**TJ and CZ:** *Music and fashion were inextricably linked in the 1960s. What role did music and dancing play in Paraphernalia, and in your designs?*

**BJ:** THE ROCK N' ROLL, PANYTHOSE, NO BRA, GO GO DANCERS- IT WAS ALL ONE. EVERYTHING INFLUENCED EVERYTHING ELSE. IT WAS A TIGHT FORMULA OF ALL THINGS NEW.

**TJ and CZ:** *How did people react to Paraphernalia when it first opened, and who was Paraphernalia's customer?*

**BJ:** MOST PEOPLE WERE VERY SCARED TO EVEN WALK IN THE STORE. THE OTHER PEOPLE WHO GOT IT, FROM YOUNG WEALTHY DEBUTANTES TO THE DOWNTOWN COOL PATTI SMITH, GOT IT BECAUSE THEY UNDERSTOOD ITS NEWNESS AND CONNECTION TO MUSIC AND ART.

**TJ and CZ:** *Where were you shopping and hanging out in New York City during the 1960s?*

**BJ:** MAX'S KANSAS CITY, THE CHELSEA HOTEL, ELECTRIC CIRCUS, THE DOM. I WORE MY OWN STUFF AND SHOPPED IN VINTAGE STORES ON ST. MARKS.

**TJ and CZ:** *How do you think that youth culture impacts the fashion world today, from design to marketing?*

**BJ:** YOUTH ALWAYS HAS AND ALWAYS WILL RULE! YIPEE!!!

**Tracy Jenkins** fondly remembers shopping at Betsey Johnson's boutique on Newbury Street in Boston as a teenager. She is delighted to be able to continue delving into boutique culture for her research on New York's Charivari.

**Cassidy Zachary's** obsession with avant-garde fashion extends all the way back to the 1910s. She is researching music-hall muse Gaby Deslys for her presentation at FIT's annual Fashion and Textile Symposium in May.

**Youthquake! The 1960s Fashion Revolution** is curated by FIT graduate students in the Master of Arts program in Fashion and Textile Studies: History, Theory, Museum Practice, in collaboration with the Museum at FIT curators and staff. The students work with objects primarily from the Museum at FIT's costume and accessories collections.