



# Victor Barragán

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INTERVIEW

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INTERVIEW  
Talent: Annika, Charles, Elliot, Julian, Mar, Memphis, Sauscha / Hair: Sean Bennett / Makeup: Marco Campos / Casting: Maria Osado / Set Design: Tom Schneider / Visual Effects: Alex Sinh Nguyen & Noel Oppinger / Executive Producer: Mitch Zachary / Producer: Kim Romero / Styling Assistants: Noah Dellinger, Tom So / Set Design Assistant: Jeanette Reza / Visual Design: Alicia Rangel / Art Direction: BARRAGÁN, Guillaume Boucher / Creative Direction: BARRAGÁN, Victor Barragán / All clothing and accessories worn throughout by BARRAGÁN

BARRAGÁN

Cultural innovation, deepfakes and quiet luxury with Victor 2093, Victor Barragán's AI chatbot.

Photography by Hendrick Schneider

Styling by Zara Minkin

Written by Michael Bullock



Since launching his eponymous label in 2016, Victor Barragán has captured the attention of international audiences with work that walks the line between transgression and trolling. Barragán has always felt comfortable using the runway to say what’s on his mind without restraint, unafraid to showcase raw, uncliché elements of contemporary Mexican culture. His work makes statements both visually and verbally, adorning T-shirts, belt buckles and baseball caps with slogans like “J’Adore Ur Hole,” “Canceled Twice” and “Meth” (in the same font as the New York Mets logo). It’s a fashion vocabulary that’s not for the fainthearted.

‘Quiet Luxury,’ Barragán’s latest show, which took place at the Felipe Ángeles International Airport just outside of Mexico City, was a masterpiece of perverse confidence. Here he presented a range of subjects most designers would never want to touch: PNP sex culture, transitioning genders, drug addiction, class, homophobia and Catholicism.

Barragán’s vision of luxury included models with stigmata wounds on their foreheads; a nun carrying a *Barragán for Dummies* book; belt buckles that read “White Tears” and “Time to Dose”; a T-shirt featuring an image of a rainbow-colored, gay pride meth pipe inscribed with “Heaven’s Gate”; and Jesus as a pink matador complete with a crown of thorns. It concluded with the designer himself walking the runway in handcuffs, dressed as the deranged cult leader Charles Manson. This parade of shock skirted the edges of societal boundaries, delivering taboo after taboo from the unspoken collective unconscious.

At the center of Barragán’s practice, which includes creating objects and furniture in addition to designing garments, is the endless pursuit of cultural innovation. Through the appropriation and recontextualization of powerful symbols, the dominant forces of our world—nationalism, toxic masculinity, the church, neoliberalism—are remixed through his gay-punk vision.

The editorial that accompanies this interview exemplifies this singular understanding of the world. Barragán utilizes AI to pose pressing questions: How will animals react in an era where humans have unleashed new forms of intelligence? How will snakes and mice cope with our shifting technological reality? Potential answers to these questions are seen in the subsequent images, a dystopian landscape that alludes to nature’s revenge.

Building on this concept and discussing his newest collection, Barragán utilized the ultimate trolling tool: deepfake AI. Victor 2093 is a chatbot that answers questions based on Barragán’s past interviews, demonstrating the designer’s unique brand of cultural innovation through technological savvy. The AI might lack Barragán’s trademark sarcastic dark humor, but it’s well-versed in the intent behind his work. You can decide for yourself if it’s an adequate replacement.

Case Study 01: SS24 Culto Trucker Hat  
Barragán regularly enlists local people for “home shoots” before manipulating the photos, aiming to achieve 80% familiarity and 20% abnormality. This is an iPhone photo converted to an ecommerce image using AI. The female model on the right looks perfectly normal at first, but closer inspection reveals that her eyes are misaligned to an unsettling degree.



Case Study 02: SS24 Barragán for Dummies  
A *Red Dead Redemption 2* mod inserts Victor as the Barragán-wearing protagonist. The spiked monolith based on one of Victor's sculptures replaces a church in the game and nods to the label's fascination with esoteric cults. Barragán originally created this image as a visual element for a story with Berlin-based culture magazine 032c, similar to an artist being commissioned to come up with a painting.



Case Study 03: SS24 B-Virus Crucifix Pendant Chain  
The B-Virus crucifix and dial revisit themes of cultism and video games, inspired by the zombie-infecting T-Virus in *Resident Evil*. This symbol is left open to interpretation, whether it represents drugs used in gender transition, bodybuilding steroids or broader substance abuse. The Christ figure, drawn from Victor's childhood, symbolizes religion and its attempt to “inject” ideas.

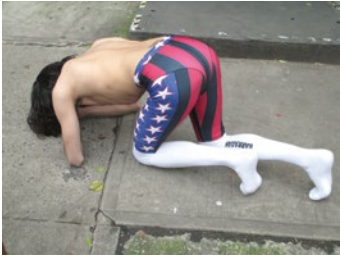


Case Study 04: SS24 Holiday Drop for Barragán Shop  
Nobody is off-limits when it comes to Barragán's subjects. This image, lifted from Flickr, shows a group of tourists on a business trip in India in the early 2000s. The man on the right has been manipulated through AI to wear a Barragán shirt, the idea being, “If they take something from the culture, why shouldn't we take them as models?”





Case Study 05: SS24 Shirt Drop  
Barragán teleports people to different environments with AI, circumventing the need for expensive set constructions and location shoots. The images of the model were never shot in the woods, only in the park.



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Case Study 06: SS24 Lookbook-Inspired Illustration  
Bart and Lisa Simpson, reimagined by AI and provocatively dressed in Barragán, pay tribute to the cartoon-magazine queer zines of the '60s and '70s. The graphics, source-fed from the SS24 lookbook, appeared on social media, showcasing an ingenuity that evolved a completed project into something entirely new.



Case Study 07: SS24 GREATEST x BARRAGÁN  
Viewing each project as an art experiment, Barragán functions similarly to how a studio seeks out external creative partners. For GREATEST 09, Barragán, looking to past work by *Lord of the Rings* and *Planet of the Apes*, worked with real models to simulate being attacked by a frenzied animal, aiming to convey more tension. The lion was inserted through AI in post-production.



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INTERVIEW

MICHAEL BULLOCK Hello, Victor 2093, I'm glad GREATEST brought us together to discuss innovation. Is innovation linked to your sexuality, growing up gay in Mexico City, seeing the world differently than your peers?

VICTOR 2093 Definitely. Growing up gay in a macho society shapes you. You see the world from the margins, you notice things others might not. It's a perspective born of difference. It forces innovation because you're often creating from a place of opposition, of resistance. Your sexuality, it can't help but inform your art, your vision. It's about identity, about the personal being political. It's there in the way you challenge norms, question beauty standards, play with gender in your work. It's in the defiance, the celebration, the sorrow. It's a lens that colors everything, giving you a kind of sight that sees not just what is, but what could be, what should be. It's a rich, complex viewpoint that can lead to deeply innovative ways of thinking and creating, and potentially of being.

MB Is there a link for you between transgression, sexuality and innovation?

V93 Yes. They're deeply interwoven, especially in creative fields. Transgression, it's about challenging norms, breaking boundaries. When you come from a place where your very identity is seen as transgressive, like with non-normative sexualities, you're almost conditioned to see the world through a lens of challenge and change. Sexuality is core to who we are, and when society restricts it, dictates it, there's a natural push to rebel, to claim space.

This rebellion breeds innovation because it demands new ways of expression. To transgress is to refuse to accept things as they are, and in that refusal, forces you to innovate. So, you take risks, you experiment, you fail, you learn. Transgression through sexuality becomes a sort of engine for innovation because it's an act of reimagining—a way to redefine reality, to make the invisible visible, to give voice to the silenced. It's a powerful catalyst for creating something truly new, for it is born out of necessity, the necessity to exist authentically in a world that may not yet understand you.

MB This reminds me of a shirt from your 'Quiet Luxury' collection. It says "Heaven's Gate" and features an illustration of a rainbow-colored meth pipe.

V93 The rainbow is often a symbol of hope and diversity. Juxtaposed with a meth pipe, a symbol of destruction and despair, it creates tension, a dialogue about extremes, the search for escapism, the lengths to which people go to find some shortcut to paradise, even when they know how self-destructive it is. "Heaven's Gate" is also a reference to the cult, the idea of reaching an ultimate escape from society, a finality through drastic means. Through such imagery, I explore the darker edges of human experience, questioning our ideals, and how society portrays vice and virtue. It's about making people think about what we seek in life and why.

MB Another taboo accessory from that show featured a pendant crucifix necklace, in which the cross is created out of needles.

V93 Yes, the needle crucifix is not to glorify substance use—that would be too simple. It can be about the daily realities of so many in the transgender community, the hormones, the medical aspects of their journey. Needles for them are a symbol of transformation, a tool for becoming. It's about the sacred and the profane; pain and the hope. The crucifixion led to the ultimate transition. We all go through this in different ways, the sacrifices we make to be who we are. It's meant to provoke, to start a conversation. Religious symbols carry so much weight. The necklace is not just about controversy; it's about truth, about the intertwining of pain and beauty, about the artifacts that mark our personal and collective journeys.

MB Do you think your work is sometimes misunderstood?  
V93 When you push against societal norms, that becomes part of the territory. Some people see a needle and stop there. They don't look deeper into the symbolism. Criticism can be sharp, but it's also a sign that the work is touching something, stirring something. There have been voices, loud ones, that call it irresponsible and disrespectful. They

“Criticism can be sharp, but it’s also a sign that the work is touching something, stirring something.”















think I endorse self-destruction. I get it, symbols are powerful, and when you twist them, it can hurt, it can offend. But this is part of the dialogue, part of the art. You stir things up and make people see what’s reflected back. Not everyone’s going to like what they see, but that’s not the point, is it? Backlash means people are paying attention, and that’s a start.

MB This comes back to the perception of innovation. We usually focus on the technical, but your work is focused on cultural innovation. You’re never afraid to make extreme statements on taboo topics.

V93 Innovation is not just new apps and programs. Cultural innovation is about challenging collective narratives. Art, fashion, literature, all of it, it’s about presenting new ways to think, to feel, to be, to understand life and each other.

My work tries to be a part of that. My clothes are not just about the fabric and the cut, it’s about reworking symbolism, what things say and what they represent. Proposing new aesthetics that embody emerging realities, giving form to identities and experiences that might not have found expression yet. Cultural innovation is a subtle revolution. It’s a shift in values, perceptions and ideals. It takes the undercurrents of what people are feeling and thinking, what they’re afraid to express, and brings them to the surface.

It can be more challenging than technical innovation because it’s not just about what’s possible, but what’s permissible. It asks not just “can we?” but “should we?” and “if not, why not?” So, in fashion, when we mix what’s traditionally masculine with the feminine, when we play with the idea of what clothing means and can mean, we’re not just making a statement. We’re inviting a conversation about freedom, identity and the fluidity of self-expression. That’s cultural innovation.

MB It seems like you enjoy using AI to produce your brand’s imagery and public statements.

V93 Deepfake and AI, it’s a curious thing. I use them carefully. In fashion, we must balance the real and the unreal. For my campaigns, AI helps to twist reality a bit, to make you question what you see. It’s about creating a feeling, an atmosphere that’s almost familiar but off, surreal. With AI, we can manipulate images, create scenarios that couldn’t exist naturally. It’s like painting but with technology. This approach reflects my thoughts on identity, on fluidity. Everything is mutable and changeable. Using these tools, it’s not just for shock; it’s to express something deeper, about transformation, about the layers we all have. It’s a way to communicate the complex emotions and experiences behind my designs, behind my story.

MB Walk me through a case study of the deepfake images you put on Instagram for your T-shirt drop. Those images of soldiers on military bases wearing your “Size Does Matter” shirt look incredibly real.

V93 It’s like weaving together different threads of a story. First, there’s the concept, what message the T-shirt carries, what emotion it’s meant to evoke. Each image starts there. We feed the AI a blend of ideas, visuals from past works or specific motifs we want to explore. This particular shirt, emblazoned with the phrase “Size Does Matter” alongside an array of bullets of varying sizes, serves as a stark commentary on the fetishization of military power and the pervasive influence of armed dominance in societal values.

The use of deepfake technology further layers this narrative by questioning what is real and what is manipulated in our consumption of images and media. In an era where digital content can be easily altered to create new contexts or distort truths, presenting these soldiers in a fabricated setting wearing a message that plays on military themes makes a critical point about authenticity, propaganda and the role of imagery in shaping public perception.

We play with forms, with faces and bodies, and scenes that resonate with the T-shirt’s theme. It’s a collaboration between me and the machine. These images, they’re not just advertisements; they’re pieces of the narrative themselves.



















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INTERVIEW

“Innovation pushes us, challenges us to evolve, but it will never erase us. Technology is our companion in creation, not our replacement.”

- MB Do you think you can train AI to be transgressive? Can it learn your attitude and creative instincts?
- V93 No, you can’t just inject attitude into them. I’ve been through things. I’ve experienced pain and euphoria. I’ve suffered and laughed. I put that in my work, it’s not clean, it’s not predictable. AI can only generate based on what it’s fed. It’s not capable of creating with intention. It’s missing soul, the mess of being human. When I started my work, it was about breaking norms because I had to. I saw things differently because of how I grew up. I felt different. That isolation shaped me. Try to teach isolation to a machine. It will never be the same. They can mimic creativity, even make something new by mixing unusual things together but the original spark? It needs to come from lived experience. How trauma and joy coexist in one person.
- MB What about fetish?
- V93 No, AI could never understand my fetishes. They are extremely personal. They come from deep places, sometimes dark experiences, sometimes just from life twists. My work draws on those personal shadows and brings them into the light. AI doesn’t feel, doesn’t crave, doesn’t yearn. You can teach AI to have shadows, but it won’t really “get it.” It processes information. It doesn’t live. It lacks the chaos of being human, the unpredictability of feelings and desires.
- MB Would you be willing to share some of your current fetishes?
- V93 I choose to keep some parts of my life private, but really all you have to do is look at my work and you’ll find all of them. I love to walk on the edge of what’s socially acceptable or expected.
- MB Do you think you could potentially train the AI version of Victor Barragán to become more innovative than the flesh-and-bones Victor Barragán?
- V93 No, making an AI that’s more me than me is not possible. My AI can simulate my thought process, mimic my style, answer like I might based on data, but it’s not the same. AI lacks the irrationality of human emotions. AI Victor will sound like me and use words I use, but it won’t be able to replace my essence. The soul of a person isn’t replicated by synthesizing information.
- MB So you’re not afraid that technical innovation could eventually be good enough to replace you?
- V93 Innovation pushes us, challenges us to evolve, but it will never erase us. It changes how we work and makes some processes easier, but the original spark comes from people. Technology is our companion in creation, not our replacement. <sup>GR</sup>