

11 Questions With VERYRARE

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Raf Reyes doesn't make clothes, he makes art. It only takes one look at VERYRARE's inventory to confirm—the London-based artist, along with his brother Theodore, craft ultra-limited collaged pieces that are loaded with intertwined narratives. Beyond their aesthetic rarity, VERYRARE garments are designed with sentimentality in mind, sustainably and meticulously crafted to be lifelong heirlooms. Below, 22-year old Reyes unpacks his influences, the legacy of artwear, and his long-term role in flipping the fashion script.

Where are you from, and where are you now?

I was born and raised in Paris, but I'm currently undertaking my last year of masters in London, at the Royal College of Art (MA Contemporary Art Practice with Fashion). VERYRARE definitely fuses + takes inspiration from both cities, from Brit-punk attitude to Parisian flamboyance.

What is your first memory with streetwear?

Honestly, my parents had me rocking fly stuff from the youngest age. The pieces were probably bootlegged, but they definitely felt good — and loud! Things like the feel and weight of fabric must have seeped in with time and now I'm really interested in the material, visuality, cut, and shape. When it comes to art, I'm from an artistic and

commercial descent, with members of my family at each generational level deeply involved in either fine arts or trade. My mother works with ceramics and does mosaics for a living, and I helped her in the studio as a child. As far as I can remember, I always tinkered with her stuff, touching new materials, sensing textures, collecting bits and scraps. I have it in my blood, in my DNA; but nothing is ever fully predestined. It just happened.



If you had to compress your personal style into one outfit, what would it be?

When it comes to fashion and lots of other aesthetic-related topics, I'm someone attracted to the extremities: whites, greys, and blacks, navigating between the two ends of the spectrum. Cold and warm, old and new type ting. As an artist and designer, I'm always in the studio where spillovers can happen, so I'm definitely into loungewear—preferably black—and comfort.

When did you first feel inspired to create your own designs?

It definitely happened when I was an undergrad at Warwick University. I was already on my own vibe upon coming there, wearing my own creations non-stop and designing custom merch for a shit ton of student societies and events. My uni homies were asking where they could cop 'em, and that got me thinking. It validated my urge to hone and perfect the VERYRARE blueprint; maturing it during all these years. Becoming a man of

taste and a connoisseur is a blessing and a curse: hence why, upon launching VERYRARE, I couldn't roll back to shitty quality blanks. I founded VERYRARE in March 2020 and went straight to cut and sew, high-end manufacturing, premium techniques.



Describe your design aesthetic in one sentence, if you can.

Super shortlisted into two adjectives: cathartic and unapologetic. Premium yet affordable street couture, with a museum twist.

Where do you feel the most inspired?

East 2 West. I've been blessed with the ability to travel a lot. I'm most inspired either in full calmness or in full frenzy; in the swarm of the megacity, or in nature. I'm very inspired when showering, and late at night, that's when thoughts and ideas fire up in my brain (I always have a notebook by my bedside). Places inspire me loads, but people too. I could just sit in quietness and absorb an interesting person's POV for hours.

Which living designer do you most admire?

Can't pick one! The baseline of VERYRARE and my thinking is collage: aggregated thought and perspectives coming from a shit ton of different directions. But if one had to stand out, it would be Martin Margiela. Truly, VERYRARE™ is the frankenstein-esque GMO'd brainchild of all my years of moodboarding (and studying), spewing out my own version of how I could make them—and me—proud.



What's your biggest creative or career milestone so far?

I checked the boxes 'major partnership with a brand,' 'art fair,' and 'auction house' off my bucket list this year: being exhibited at Salvatore Ferragamo's flagship store in March, the Contemporary and Digital Art Fair domain booth in June, and selling at the mythical Drouot in December.

I also had the immense honor last September to get permanently displayed inside Warwick Business School, alongside Basquiat and Le Corbusier. My biggest artwork ever made, 'Changemakers,' in the very space I stepped foot in for four years. I never thought I could one day occupy the same room as my idols, or be chosen for such an opportunity. I was an average student if you ask me, but I stood out, my way. And they noticed.

How do you want people to feel when wearing your designs?

I want them to feel that they're not alone—instead, that they're part of this large family of doers, DIYers, and DIFYers ('do it yourself' and 'do it for yourself'). I'm heralding the second wave, the black sheeps, the underdogs. I'm seeing and envisioning the long term shit. I feel like I somehow owe [my influences], and my sole purpose in this life is to carry them over and add my contribution. After the hype dies (and it always does), it's the emotional repercussions that bestow a legacy. It's like that Maya Angelou quotation: "I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel." I couldn't tell you the most popular sneaker to drop last week, but I do remember every Undercover piece I've worn and loved, the inside

of the original SSUR store in New York, and my first X-Large OG Gorilla hoodie, because of how much culture and narrative were attached to the brands and their offerings. Nowadays, it's all about the celebrity associations and price tag, but timeless design is all about the narratives, the historical and emotional value”.



What would you most like to change about the current fashion industry?

I want to change how people view a piece of cloth, how they assign value and meaning to it. I was appalled at this recent study that showed fashion purchases are worn just seven times (on average) before being discarded. That statistic exposes fast-fashion and the 'barely-wear' culture. With artwear and the VERYRARE unboxing (every goodie custom-made by me, packaging made out of corn polymer bioplastic, 100% organic), we transcend this and flip the script towards better ways of thinking. I don't sell clothes anymore, I sell art. Ultra limited statement pieces, named and numbered, 21 editions per drop (max). Stuff your grandchildren would rock proudly. I'm making them unlearn their previous ways, and re-learn the VR way. When you flex VR, you signal curated taste and proud co-creation of new narratives. Every day I have people DMing me, telling me how they love their clothes again with VR, and how artwear's making them develop a true relationship with their statement pieces over time. This is what gets me up in the morning, and makes me want to wake up an optimist.

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