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New York Drag: An Interview with Victor Demarchelier

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When acclaimed fashion photographer Victor Demarchelier began taking portraits of drag queens in his Tribeca studio, he had no idea where it would lead him. Fifty portraits in and it was obvious; His book, *New York Drag*, is both a striking tribute to New York’s drag scene and a celebration of the individual—as well as the artistry behind each subject’s sense of self-expression.

In celebration of Pride Month, The Roxy Hotel is hosting an exhibition of these powerful portraits; “NEW YORK DRAG” showcases select works from his book and will be on view through August 31st. We sat down with Victor to learn the story behind *New York Drag*, his creative process and to hear about what he’s working on next.

(*Hint hint*: his latest book celebrating the work of his father, renowned French fashion photographer Patrick Demarchelier, scheduled for release this September. Mark your calendars!)

Hillary Sproul: Why did you first become interested in documenting the New York drag scene?

Victor Demarchelier: I wanted to photograph something new to me. People I hadn’t had the opportunity to shoot yet in my career. When stylist Jimi Urquiaga reached out to me with the opportunity, I jumped on it! We started with the idea of turning the shoot into an editorial but I couldn’t stop—and after shooting over fifty drags, I felt a book was the best way to embody the work.

HS: What was your approach to photographing your subjects for this series? In what ways did it differ from your usual approach to portraiture?

VD: It didn’t! I felt they needed to be shot in exactly the same way I would shoot anyone else. I wanted beautiful, strong, classic portraiture.

HS: How did you find most of your subjects?

VD: Jimi Urquiaga.

HS: What did you want to say and explore with this series?

VD: I wanted to give the drags the same care and attention I would to any supermodel. I wanted to show them in a more quiet and refined way

HS: At what point did you realize you had enough work to put together a book?

VD: Once we were over fifty. There were so many incredible shots that hardly anything was dropped.

HS: What is it about someone that makes you want to photograph them?

VD: Mystery. Beauty.

HS: When approaching portraiture, is there any particular strategy you employ?

VD: I like to give my subjects space and freedom within the environment I create, and provide only very limited input.



HS: I know your father was a renowned photographer. I can imagine that, just by nature, you likely have similar aesthetic tastes and perspectives. Did that make you feel the need to set yourself apart from his aesthetic approach in any way when you first began your career?

VD: I draw a lot of inspiration from his work; he was my mentor and father. Even though there might be similarities, I think we are unique in our own ways. I don’t think you can change who you are though.

HS: When did you first open your mind to the idea that you may follow in his footsteps?

VD: Shortly after college, I began working for him. It wasn’t long after that that I knew I wanted to pursue photography.

HS: What is it about photography that you love, both as an artform and as a lifestyle?

VD: I think it’s the love of life in general, a curiosity to meet new people and discover new things... Everybody owns a camera and takes pictures now. I think now, more than ever, people can relate to photography.

HS: How has growing up around the world of photography informed your work? Did it feel limiting or expansive to have so much familiarity and knowledge going into photography as a career?

VD: A bit of both. You definitely can’t teach taste and I think growing up around creative people helped push me along and open up my eyes.

HS: What has brought you the most joy through your work?

VD: I love the entire creative process. I love thinking of new ideas, traveling to new places and meeting new people.

HS: What have you been working on recently?

VD: A new book for my dad, which will be released this September, which I am very proud of.

NEW YORK DRAG by Victor Demarchelier is on view at The Roxy Hotel through September 2nd.

WORDS Hillary Sproul

PHOTOGRAPHY courtesy of the artist Victor Demarchelier

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