



Professional photographer

# JF LE CHASSEUR

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**“I LIKE TO EXPLORE THE FRAGILITY OF HUMANS, THEIR SORROWS, THEIR LONELINESS, NOSTALGIA, AND THEIR VULNERABILITY. VERY MELANCHOLIC THEMES IN A COLORFUL AND SEXY UNIVERSE AS IF IT WERE A TRIBUTE TO SILENT SADNESS.”**

I was born and raised in a suburb of Quebec City, the oldest city in Canada. It's a beautiful city with an impressive historical background. It brings a huge amount of tourists because of the castle and the great walls of the fortification. But, it's very conservative and has no big cultural background. For me, something is missing, so I decided to move to Montreal and study cinema. Since then, it's a love story between Montreal and me. Oh man, I love this city. This place is really hard to describe, but I like to call it friendly ugliness. It is not the most beautiful city in America; a lot of things are falling apart, old factories are abandoned, our roads are incredibly destroyed, the architecture can be questionable at some points, and the winter is a long cold gray one. But when spring comes, people finally wake up from a whole depressing season, and the city suddenly becomes very lively and full of energy. The parks are turning green again, and people are gathering on the terraces, and there are many festivals taking place. A city with an incredible gastronomic culture; the streets always smell food. It's probably because of all of this that makes me love Montreal. It's like an underdog where behind its ugliness hides something varied, authentic, and immensely beautiful. This can be very inspiring.

But working there as an artist can be tough. It's a big city but very small at the same time. There is a lot of artists living here where a certain competition sets in. The demand is not strong enough, and many must find part-time jobs. It is for this reason that I am a freelance photographer. I have been a salesman in a camera shop. I have also been a video club clerk, a production assistant for films and tv series, a video editor, a waiter, a bartender, and now a horticulturalist because of the pandemic. But even with these jobs, I have always been able to do well as a photographer for 15 years. I like to say that I am a jack of all trades, and it allows me to meet as many different people as possible in different work spheres.

As far back as I can remember, I always had a camera with me when I was a child. Some people nicknamed me Kid Kodak. I always took pictures of my friends at school and lined my bedroom walls with pictures I took of them. If someone was missing on my wall, I would play paparazzi to make sure I had a picture of all my friends. My camera was always in the bottom of my backpack for many years. One day, I searched through an old memory box from my parents and found an old 35mm Yashica. I was very impressed by the camera. It was so complicated, and even my



parents couldn't remember how it worked. I bought a 35mm film with pocket money. I practiced a lot with this camera that I still have today. And one day, I went to New York with some friends from college. They were the most beautiful travel photos ever. I showed them to everyone at school. Seeing the results, a friend told me about a non-academic photo club with a darkroom black and white film development at school. I was so excited about it I think I signed up the next day. Slowly, I understood the process of photography, and I have to say that it all started then. It became my first love story. A few years later, I received my first digital camera just before a trip to Western Canada and America. I learned on my own, and I often told myself that photography was just a hobby since I am self-taught. This was a question that annoyed me for a long time.

I lived with the impostor syndrome for a very long time because the academic diploma is a kind of professional validation, and I did not have this recognition. I studied media communication, cinematographic literature, and television production. I believe it was beneficial for my art in photography, even though it was unrelated. I learned a lot about the importance of narrative structures, how to direct the actors and a production team, the importance of demonstrating emotions for the audience, the codes of the body language, and the symbolism of colors. All this baggage of knowledge, as important as mundane, could surely have been useful for my art. I started to have a few contracts without even having to look for them. I guess the passion was showing, and that's what matters. Clearly, my

technical knowledge comes in less quickly than students, but this has never demotivated me. I always continue to do photography because I like it. I could probably never stop doing it. Fun fact, when I worked in a photography shop, I was surrounded by young photography students. I was so intimidated by them because they had a lot of technical knowledge and were starting to operate studios together, while on my side, I was still trying to figure out how studio lights work. I constantly compare my work with them. I continued to learn on my own and had to learn not to give a damn about criticism from them. Today, those old former coworkers have all sold their equipment and are doing another job - note the importance of patience, persistence, following our instincts, and what turns us on. At 37, I still wonder if I should go learn more in school or stay stubborn and continue my way.

**M**y style of photography has always seemed difficult to describe since my projects do not follow a specific path or a logical sequence. On the other hand, I try to keep the same signature from project to project. I like to explore the fragility of humans, their sorrows, their loneliness, nostalgia, and their vulnerability. Very melancholic themes in a colorful and sexy universe as if it were a tribute to silent sadness. In my opinion, there is great beauty in this emotion, something grand that needs to be expressed, seen, and heard. But that is, unfortunately, rarely celebrated these days. Whether it's flowers or portraits, I always try to make the object melancholic or fragile. Sometimes I try to make things a little less

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depressing, but my eyes always come back to researching these themes. For the last few years, I've been exploring fashion but always try to twist the shoot into a cinematic image with a storyline rather than showing clothes on someone sexy. Sometimes stylists and designers find it hard to understand my way of working because I am constantly looking for strong emotions, which can seem a little depressing or too deep for the fashion world. So, the last few shoots I did, I'm trying to go something a little more cheerful, sexy or weird by exploring the fluidity of genres and queer identity. And I must say that this new exploration thrills me. Moreover, I consider that in the fluidity of genres (through clothing), there is a kind of vulnerability and sensitivity that emerge. So finally, I still come back to the same themes.

To this day, it is very difficult for me to say which is my favorite photo since my appreciation is based on my personal accomplishment and how I felt when I push the button on my camera. I would say that I have a weakness for a photo of a project called *Forteresse*, a duo of men dressed in a houndstooth kit on an antique sofa. I don't know why I adore it, but it exudes a subtle heartbroken solitude in a rococo setting. During the shoot, the whole team had their eyes riveted on the scene, exclaiming that it was so beautiful to see. I think my team's reaction also colored my appreciation. Otherwise, I really like the first photo that made a fashion magazine cover; a giant woman in a ballroom corridor. I called this photo series *Pedestal*. With her femme fatale elegance and her presence, that makes one of the photos that I really appreciate. Once again, the team watching the scene was very stunned.

The main creative projects that paid me off and made me really proud are music album projects. I haven't done a lot, but these are projects that I really enjoyed. As a music lover myself, music is my primary source of inspiration. It is very easy for me to imagine the music. I have long wanted to become a music video director, but I think I belong as a visual designer for a music album. My first photography contracts were for restaurant menus. I was an executor according to very specific guidelines. Over the years, I have been trusted with my artistic vision for people who express themselves in the form of art that I greatly appreciate.

One day, I was asked how I visualize this or that project and what I would have done to represent the artist. I proposed my idea, and we worked hard to make it happen. And suddenly one day I saw all the products in music stores, albums and big banners for promotion. There were posters on buildings and walls all over town. I was very proud.

Unfortunately, and even with all the work I have done, I am still a freelance photographer. I am not with an agency. So I have to look for contracts by myself. But I hope it will come one day. I think it isn't easy to be represented in an agency in Montreal. I had a meeting with a photographer in an agency who explained that agencies have popularity criteria that come into play, such as the number of followers on Instagram, which must exceed 5000. But agencies here are more interested in big business advertising, and that doesn't really interest me. I like to do my best and direct myself to where life takes me and focus on what I want to show rather than having concepts imposed on me.



Exclusive Interview



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When I have to plan a photoshoot, I have to take care of a lot of things depending on the size of the shoot and the type of project. It's a source of motivation. Firstly, finding the initial idea and inspiration can be a long process, especially when it comes to an artistic project. I believe the hardest part is finding a motivated and talented team that can match my vision. Then I have to find a place, and it's a huge puzzle because some people are a little afraid of photographers and their activities. I often get negative responses because they are concerned about their private

When it comes to inspiration, I use Pinterest and Instagram to create moodboards to then share with my team in the creation process. But I have to stay focused on my project because it's easy to be distracted by everything around on social media. But, it helps to put the ideas in order without explaining eternally in words the whole vision of the project. I often talk to my art director, who guides me towards avenues that I may not have explored. Then, the stylist consults the moodboard and shares her creative vision with me in relation to what I show her and

to make the decisions that seem to be the best, but at the same time, I can be very insecure with my editorial or artistic choices. One day I find something super cool, and the next day I wonder if it really was. I sometimes need external guidance to reassure me and convince me that I am on the right track. Also, I question myself on the relevance of doing what I do; I'm afraid to do that for no valid reason and that, ultimately, people don't care. But I believe that I am in no way an exception from these artistic insecurities. Artists all live in this fear of failure and of having no

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ownership, and they don't want it to appear in magazines or other forms of media. So, I often used my workplace to make my job easier. After all that planning, there is coordination and management to make sure everything is going well for everyone. So it can be a very long process for a single day, not being sure about the project release. We do this because we really like it.

Now I have my own studio, and it's so much less complicated because it's located in a building with a large punk, artist community where there is a lot of mutual aid. A very inspiring place that makes my creative flow more easily.

the models I have chosen. It quickly becomes a collaboration between artists, and it nourishes the works. Among these collaborators, there are the models, some of whom I have a beautiful symbiosis. They understand where I am going with the creative process, where I often let my instincts and intuitions guide me. I can work more than once with some of them. I hope to find the greatest muse who can perfectly translate what I have in mind and transpose it into images.

As an individual creator, I often have to face the fact that I am alone in many stages of creation. Sometimes it's a very good thing

artistic value. It happens that my lack of confidence makes me doubt everything. But I am learning from myself at the same time. It's part of the game.

On the other hand, we have to be honest about ourselves. Art is not made to be appreciated by everyone, but it is made to live and be seen. It's a little reminder that I tell myself when I'm in a creative hollow or doubt.

If I could change anything in the artistic community would probably be the importance of public relation commonly referred to as PR. It's completely overrated. It takes up too much space, and many people rely too





much on the ability to sell themselves well to others. It forms an artistic elite and often brings the same artists to the front line. As a result, there is no diversity, and everything becomes standardized according to the vision of the person who is best equipped to do PR and who has the most recognition among his peers. This generates a lot of competition according to compliant standards. This is what I see in Montreal, but I know that it is not the same everywhere. I have a friend who lives in New York and tells me that there are a lot more mutual aid and photographer collectives being formed and who exchange contracts according to their strengths and weaknesses. It's not every man for himself, and I find it a great way to learn by sharing knowledge.

**W**hen my work is displayed to the public, it is obvious that I am very proud of myself and that it allows me to give myself more confidence. On the other hand, that does not influence and should never influence me on the next projects because I know that the criteria of a magazine or other distribution methods are based on an editorial choice that cannot always match. The decisions come from someone, and that person does not have a monopoly on good taste. Appreciation is very subjective; I cannot base my artistic choices on commercial criteria or please certain people from different backgrounds. It would become counterproductive. How many painters, photographers, musicians, and comedians have been turned down before being successful. The key is to remain authentic and loving what you do.

When it comes to criticism, I usually have good comments, good feedback. Obviously, I do not think I am unanimous. Still, the contrary opinion does not belong to me because everyone has their own tastes according to their different backgrounds, experiences, socio-cultural baggage, and references, and I cannot change that. I always try to improve myself. In the end, the only person whose criticism matters is me. Some people tell me that my photography makes them mysteriously

feel an indescribable emotion. Some people tell me that they are just beautiful portraits and that I render them well. Some also say that a story emerges or that these are cinematic images. And I'm very happy to have these kinds of comments because if I'm able to touch someone with my photos, then it's mission accomplished.

My long-term goal would be to have my own opening or be exhibited in a public place. I have always fantasized about the principle of street art as an open-air museum. I like this idea, but for now, the magazines that publish me are important to me. And I try to develop other artistic projects that are close to my heart that I have been thinking about for a few years. Thinking too far gives me a little bit of anxiety, and I take it one day at a time.

**I** don't know my photos will leave a legacy for future generations. There are so many artists and photographers on the planet with so much talent. It isn't easy to see yourself bequeathing something to future generations. Especially now, we live in an image bombardment ceaselessly, which has such a short lifespan. There is a lot of flattery, distraction, and so many voices to comment on what you're doing and how you should do it. We live in an era of constant stimulation, and it is difficult to stay focused. It is a challenge in itself to concentrate on our art and project ourselves into a long and distant future. Everything moves very quickly. I do know that I still have a lot to learn to sharpen my signature and polish my vision. I continue to do what I love, and I am proud of where I am in my life as an artist.

I don't know exactly what success is and how to reach it, but I can advise some new creatives with these simple mantras. Don't take yourself too seriously. Be humble. Don't take criticism from people you don't know very seriously too. Be very, very, very respectful with your models, and listen to them. Learn to listen. Do your own thing. And just do it.