





*"You have a responsibility to your subject and the age of digital is erasing that responsibility. If you had one single frame to make an image I would ask, what is this one frame saying about this person, and what is it saying about you as a photographer?"*

*—Joey Lawrence*

BY RYAN PHILLIPS

# JOEY L.

The remarkable career of 20-year-old wunderkind *Joey Lawrence*

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Commercial, documentary, fine-art shooter Joey Lawrence goes by simply Joey L., which, as a prolific 20-year-old phenom, he pulls off easily. Growing up on the farmland of Lindsay, just outside Toronto, Lawrence describes his parents as creative and loving, and credits his success to them for allowing him to follow his dream.

Lawrence started out photographing local bands. Wanting more, he set his sights on New York, and at 18 landed a commission to shoot some of the hottest new artists in music. Two of his first major jobs were for rapper 50 Cent and the Jonas Brothers. With a portfolio

underway and an agent to represent him, Lawrence was hired by Summit Entertainment to create the posters for the hugely popular movie, "Twilight."

What does an 18-year-old do after landing three monster jobs in NYC? This one jumped on a plane to document the declining population of the indigenous tribes of Ethiopia. It would be the first of three sojourns he'd make for this personal project, and the resulting body of work would earn Joey L. international recognition and his own series for Ovation TV with pending syndication through the National Geographic Channel.



ogy rather than photography, if their goal is to document the human condition.

He began photographing age-old cultures at great personal and financial risk to himself. There's an urgency to gather what stories he can before such cultures are swallowed up by modern society. The shoots were mostly in remote locations that took several arduous days to reach, but the value of the work is undeniable when you see the young daughter of the tribal leader wearing a Disneyland t-shirt.

Lawrence shoots with a Phase 1 P65+ camera and an 80mm prime lens. He uses a Canon EOS-1Ds Mark III as well, but only with fast-moving subjects or in extremely low light. Medium format dictates his slow pace. He takes the time to find the location and build the scene one light at a time. At the end of the day, he's got maybe 15 shots total; when the work is done right in-camera, he doesn't need to weed out technical problems, just choose the

On returning to New York, Lawrence put together a gallery of the images for exhibition at The Foundry in Manhattan, which brought him to the attention of key art directors and steady new work. Lawrence shot promo images for the TV shows "It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia," The History Channel's "Pawn Stars" and "American Pickers," and ad campaigns for Kawasaki.

Lawrence learned about the art of photography by studying the old masters and the fundamentals of photography, and then the technology. The slow manner in which he works, he says, is integral to his success in making the final image. He can spend hours warming up the subject before taking his camera out of the bag. In fact, half smiling, Lawrence suggests that new photographers should read up on psychol-



ones that elicit an emotional response.

His lighting setup ranges from simple to elaborate, depending on the situation. In Ethiopia he did one-light portraits. On set he might use as many as 20 lights. He started out with a set of AlienBees strobes and a couple of modifiers, and now owns tons of Profoto gear. With celebrity clientele, he often has to set up multiple scenes and be ready to go when the client arrives, so he needs enough lighting for at least three sets at a time. When he's not using his lighting gear, he rents it out—a great source of revenue for his studio.

Lawrence says the online photographic

community has been crucial to him. His main source of information comes from his Twitter followers, more than 9,000 fans ready to help out. Many of his clients discovered him through his blog, which logs close to 10,000 visitors a day.

More than half of Lawrence's working time is dedicated to branding himself and keeping in touch through blogging, educational videos and general marketing to art directors, though he does have an agent. Unlike most photographers, Lawrence still shows his work in a portfolio of prints.

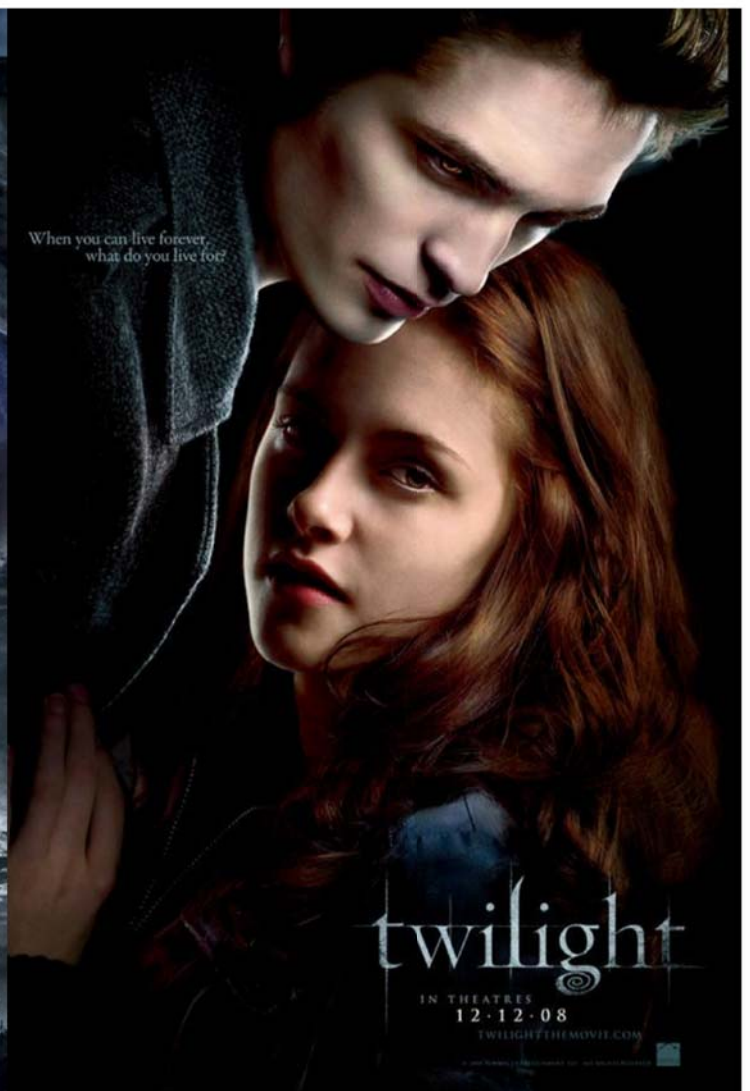
He's currently printing on Hahnemühle paper, and usually shuffles four books at

once. To an art director who's thinking about a final print, Lawrence's portfolio makes a huge impact.

"Yes, the iPad is cool, especially if you're into video, but for me it's a really bad way to show off photography," he says. "I'm often hired to shoot for a magazine cover, and the art director needs to see the quality of what I'm producing."

At 20, Lawrence has to convey a good measure of confidence to Madison Avenue ad agencies. "You have to open yourself to repeated rejection, then use it as a learning process. It's the only way you will get anywhere."

Lawrence keeps his workflow simple, editing



his selects with Photo Mechanic software, then Phase One Capture One, which he prefers for the skin tones it produces. He delivers printed contact sheets or proof galleries online, via Photo Mechanic HTML gallery.

When asked about his ethics as a professional photographer, Lawrence replies, "You have a responsibility to your subject and the age of digital is erasing that responsibility. If you had one single frame to make an image I would ask, what is this one frame saying about this person, and what is it saying about you as a photographer?" ■

*See more of Joey L.'s work at [joeyl.com](http://joeyl.com).*

