

Creative Inspiration



“Due to the taboo around suicide, society ignores it,” says Cristobal Ascencio. “I realised if I worked with this subject, I could create a conversation around suicide from my perspective. I knew it would be tough, but it felt important to try.”

The Mexican-born, Madrid-based artist lost his father not once but twice. At 15, his father Margarito, a gardener whose name in Spanish means daisy, died from a heart attack. Margarito’s story remained that way until two years ago, when Ascencio found out his father in fact died by suicide.

“With this new information, I started looking at everything differently,” he explains. “I began to feel like everything I knew about our relationship was somehow shifting and being rearranged. My dad’s death has always been something I held very sacred – it was a traumatic event that shaped me. When the circumstances around this changed, I questioned everything, trying to make sense of my memories.”

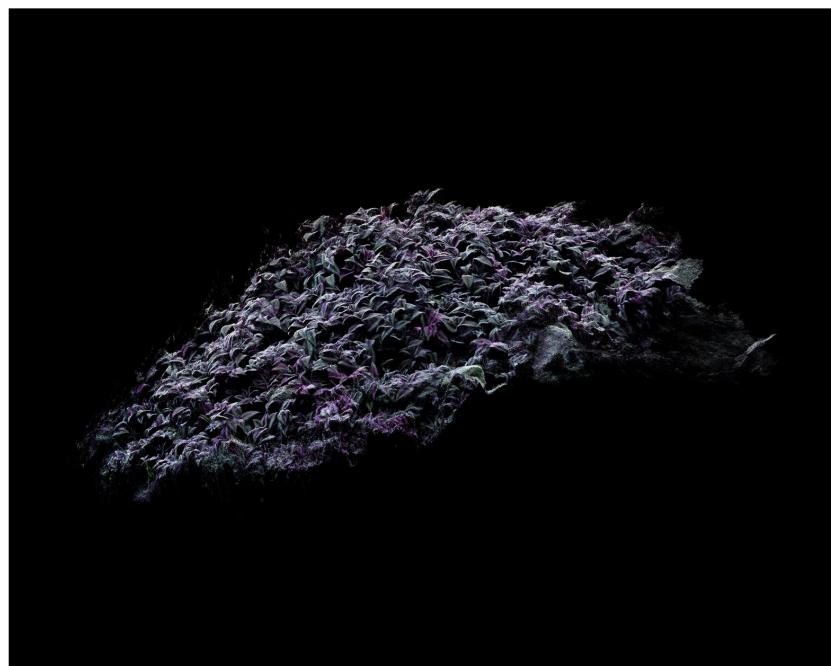


Top and above: From the series Las Flores Mueren Dos Veces

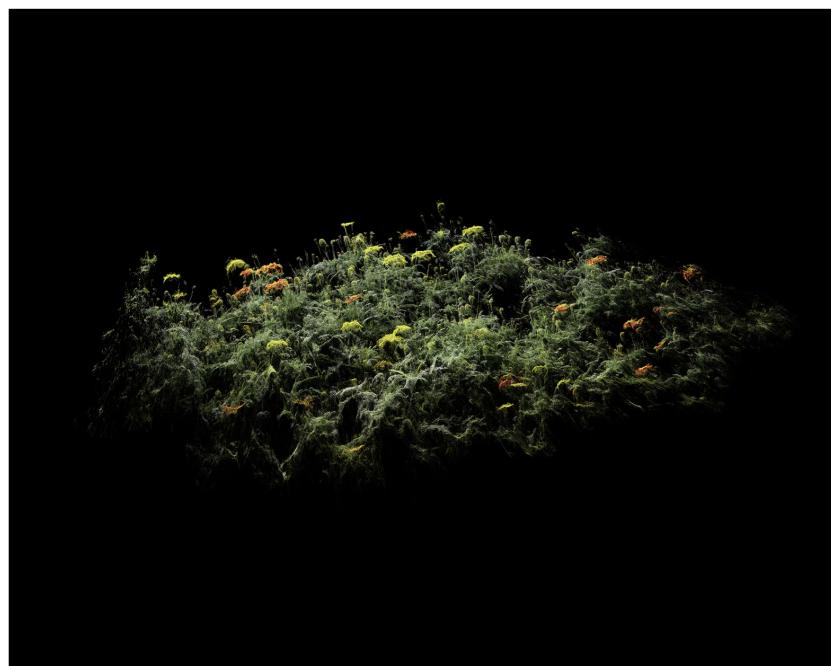
Growing up in a large, tight-knit family in Guadalajara, Ascencio always understood family photographs to be precious objects. Hoarded in chests and albums, picture-making was a love language, a way to hold people close and feel together even when they were apart. From a young age, he remembers taking images from the family collections to make his own. “I always felt nostalgic about the past, and I wanted to be close to those moments, so I kept those pictures near me.” For Ascencio, photography became a vessel for emotions, and this formative relationship with pictures laid the blueprint for his career.

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In his latest work, *Las Flores Mueren Dos Veces* (meaning The Flowers Die Twice in Spanish), Ascencio attempts to reconcile and metabolise his father’s suicide. Blending vernacular images with digital disturbances, he reimagines and remaps his past, creating a new visual language that speaks to the slippery nature of truth and memory.



From the series Las Flores Mueren Dos Veces

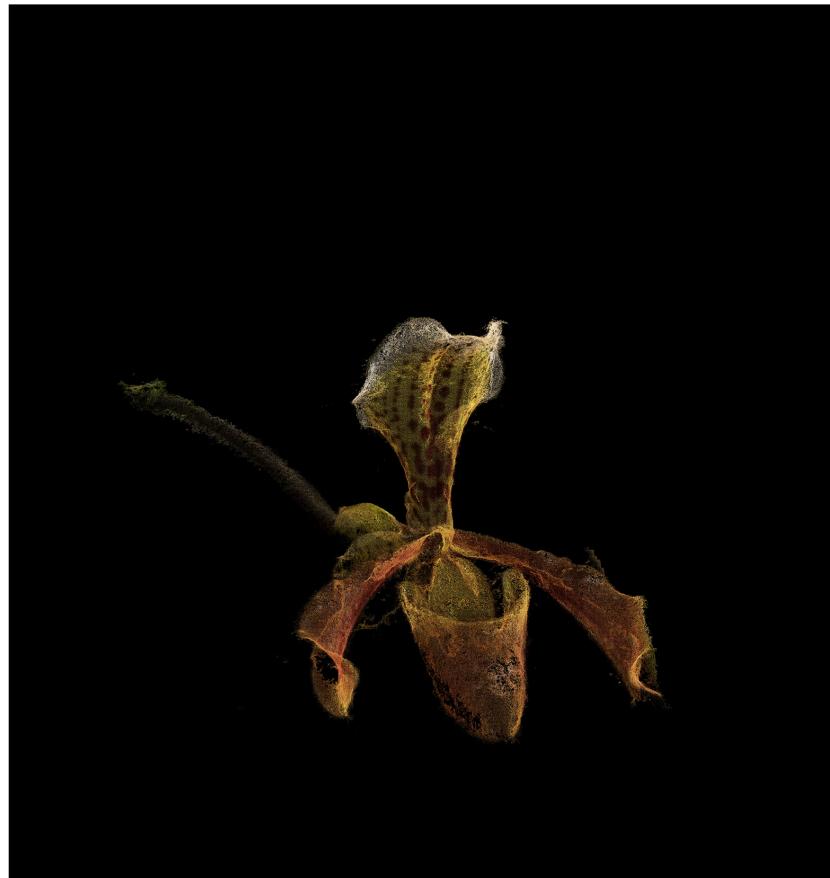




From the series *Las Flores Mueren Dos Veces*

Created by pixel sorting, a technique that allows you to rearrange the data of an image without adding anything, the images shift and move, occupying new frequencies that feel familiar and inaccessible simultaneously. While digital inventions can often feel cold and detached, Ascencio's series embodies a deep emotionality, describing the newfound gaps in his personal history without trying to fill them all in.

"When I first found out about my dad's suicide, I was angry," he says. "I was trying to make sense of it or find a justification for what he did, and of course I couldn't, so that made me feel extremely frustrated. After a while, I realised that I would never understand his decision. Trying to understand what motivates someone to take their own life can send us down a spiral of never-ending questions and emotions that we cannot possibly understand – I eventually came to peace with that."





From the series *Las Flores Mueren Dos Veces*

Ascencio points to Apichatpong Weerasethakul's film, *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives*, as an essential inspiration. "There is a scene in the film where a ghost [Uncle Boonmee's wife] comes back to visit the family while they are having dinner. They update the ghost on their lives by showing her pictures. That scene just clicked for me – I started thinking about what I would do if my dad came back to visit me in that form – what would I show him, and what kind of pictures would they be? That was the starting point of the whole project."

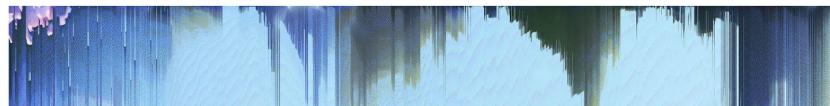
Always curious about new technologies, Ascencio was interested in pushing the boundaries of the photographic image but had no experience before starting this project. Self-taught, he describes the process as "organic", slowly acquiring the skills "step by step" through hours of experimentation. While he was captivated by the visual appeal, it was critical for him that the technology be deeply rooted in his concept rather than just using it for novelty.



From *Las Flores Mueren Dos Veces*

Las Flores Mueren Dos Veces is not just about processing the past for Ascencio; it's also about the future and finding a new way to connect with his father. "Everything about my relationship with my father revolved around plants," he explains. "He was a gardener, and I spent my childhood at his nursery, learning to take care of plants. In my dad's final letter, he signs off, 'Forgive me, and communicate with me.' I spent months thinking about how I could talk with him since he was gone. I realised that whenever I felt close to him, I was around plants – I knew I wanted to make a garden as a meeting place for me and my dad. That was how I was going to answer his letter."

To actualise his vision, he turned to virtual reality. Spending time in Mexico with his father's friends, colleagues and family members, he collated a list of flora and fauna that his father was particularly fond of. "From there, I did photogrammetry of those plants to create this digital meeting point," explains Ascencio. "In itself, it's already a connection point between two worlds – the organic and the digital."





From Las Flores Mueren Dos Veces

While the garden is a work in progress, Ascencio hopes to develop it over the next year. Walking through it is a surreal experience. Sculptural scenes of glowing blooms and fragmented organic forms sit among undeveloped spaces visioning a haunting wasteland full of possibility. In this non-space, or bridge between worlds, Ascencio hopes we can contemplate the paradox of memory and the uncomfortable truth that reality is fundamentally unfixed.

Ascencio is part of a new generation of young artists, including Chance DeVille, Ana Vallejo, and Bowei Young, who use their work to have nuanced discussions around mental health. Making *Las Flores Mueren Dos Veces*, Ascencio realised he could no longer untangle “the process from the subject he’s speaking about”.

From now on, he hopes to approach all work, personal and commercial, with the same ethos, experimenting at the intersection of photography and new technologies. “The thing I enjoy about image-making is not the final product but how photography can be a starting point for new ideas.”

cristobalascencio.com

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