

▲ *Panic Atom*, 2004 (painted with light and digital manipulation).

Depression is a word commonly confused with simple sadness, but in fact depression goes much farther. The diagnosis is very difficult because the pain is not located in a specific organ; it is not like a headache or a stomach ache.

The pain is very deep and impossible to locate, as if it were the soul that hurt. The symptoms are more difficult to detect, and most people who suffer from it are not aware of it.

In my case, depression has been a way of life. I have had it since I was a little girl, and it was not until I had a nervous breakdown that lasted for about three months that I was diagnosed. As soon as I recovered from the breakdown, I began this photography project and began to do research on the topic.

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▲ *Soul of a Moth*, 2004 (painted with light and digital manipulation).

Depression is an illness that is spreading very rapidly among young adults. These young adults are part of what has been called “Generation X,” a generation that many have classified as apathetic and without ideals, but without asking the reason. A large number of people in this generation might be depressed.

It is the first generation born of families with parents who have separated, in a world that is polluted and full of fear, with the constant threat of nuclear and chemical weapons, overpopulation, the spread of drugs, AIDS, etc.

I call the part of the Generation X that is depressed the “Prozac Generation.” They were born right at the same time that the first anti-depressants were discovered, and suffer from depression at a time when tricyclic anti-depressants are making a big splash, the most popular being Prozac. A medication that, like others similar to it, allows depressives to move forward and overcome their disease. Anti-depressants and therapy are the essential formula for a successful recovery.

My photography project began with this very personal situation, and I have the feeling that many people can identify with the images in this series.

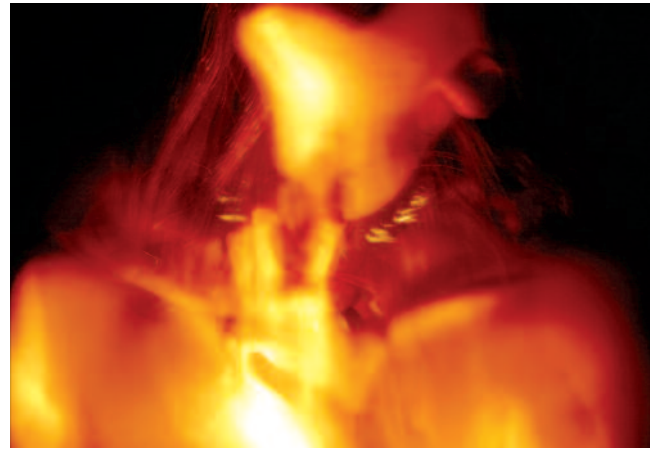
The breakdown I had just a year ago was characterized by severe depression and anxiety, including panic attacks: incapacitated, I couldn’t stop crying; I couldn’t sleep or eat; my whole body shook; and any activity that involved social interaction terrified me. I was ashamed of my behavior, but it was beyond my control. I couldn’t even breathe normally, and I had a constant fear of dying or going crazy. After three specialists and two psychologists, I was diagnosed thanks to a psychiatrist. After a year in therapy, the general state of my health has improved notably.¹

Depression implies much more than a simple drop in energy levels or mood. Someone who is depressed feels a complete lack of confidence in the future and an enormous vacuum. Recovery does not usually come overnight. It is a gradual process, especially if the depression has existed for a very long time.

In my opinion, only those who have experienced this illness at some time in their lives can describe what depression means. Over time, it has been described by different people as a kind of limbo: Winston Churchill called it “the black dog”; others have called it “the black tunnel”, “the dungeon” or “the thick fog.” For me it was like getting close to what could be hell, where the only palpable hope is death.

We know that throughout history, many creative people have suffered from depression. Actually, many have tried to demonstrate a causal relationship between depression and the creative impulse. In my case, depression did lead me to create. I felt the need to communicate what I felt and as a photographer, the only way I could do that was through images.

But the images in my mind at the time of the breakdown were difficult to represent. Analog photography was insufficient for me and, unlike my relatives, I don't paint well at all.



▲ *Release, 2004* (painted with light and digital manipulation).

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But I wasn't willing to set myself on fire to represent the pain I had felt;
that would have been very costly and dangerous.

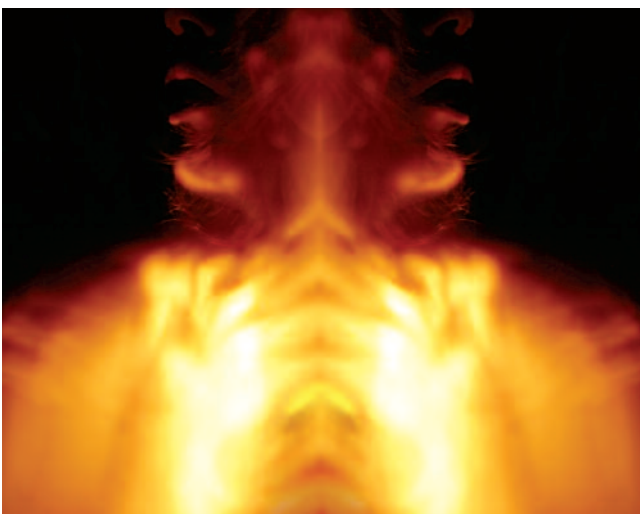
So, I resorted to digital photography, a tool only recently integrated into photography that was the cause of major discussions among image professionals. With digital technology, photography, which in the 175 years since it was created had always been catalogued as a faithful representation of reality, lost that characteristic that described it so well.

But it should not be seen as the enemy. Photography continues to have the same principles. The only thing that changes is that instead of film, we use a charge coupled device (CCD) or a

complementary metal oxide semiconductor (CMOS) image sensor that converts light into electrical charges. And, well, we have to see editing the image as an advantage, a new tool that offers infinite creative possibilities and retouching that will increase the quality of our images.

As I have already said, for me depression was a way of getting close to hell. But I wasn't willing to set myself on fire to represent the pain I had felt; that would have been very costly and dangerous. I would have needed at least one assistant at my side with a fire extinguisher in case the flames got out of control.

Digital technology facilitated my work enormously. I did everything myself with the cam-



▲ *Breaking of the Soul, 2004* (painted with light and digital manipulation).

era's timer and without putting myself in any danger. With just the light of a flashlight I was able to create digital fire. After the image goes through this creative process with the help of a computer and an editing program, photography takes on some of the characteristics of painting. It stops being a representation of reality and allows you to represent more complex things similar to the ones that only the human mind is capable of creating.



▲ *Hell, 2004* (painted with light and digital manipulation).

In this project, the images were captured with a digital reflex camera. The immediacy of this technology allowed me to see the moment, the frame, the time of exposure I needed, the way I should change my movements or those of the flashlight, and I didn't have to wait to develop the photos to see the results or use polaroids. In the computer, I used these images to create other, more complex ones that allowed me to communicate what I wanted.

It is true that experimenting with this technology requires a very big investment. But that's only at the beginning, and the expenditure can be recuperated after a few months of working with the equipment.

A digital camera, a flashlight and a basic computer were enough to create a series of low-cost images and publish them for free in Internet on Zone Zero, founded by Pedro Meyer, one of the first promoters of digital photography.

A few years ago, many doubted that digital photography could have a future in the professional field. But technology is improving extremely rapidly and prices are dropping with time. Today, it has become indispensable for the professional photographer: delivery times are much shorter and it is in both the client's and the photographer's interest.

Certainly in the not-too-distant future, digital photography will completely replace analog photography, which will only be used as a craft medium for the romantics of photography. **MM**

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NOTES

¹ Depression is increasing worldwide. In England today, almost 3 million people suffer from depression and as a result, about 400 of them commit suicide every year. This statistic is alarming, but that is not the worst of it: at least one-third of all the people who suffer from this illness have not been diagnosed and therefore receive no treatment.