



Allen Memorial
Art Museum

AT THE ALLEN

OBERLIN COLLEGE / SPRING 2021





**Allen Memorial
Art Museum**

OBERLIN COLLEGE
87 North Main Street, Oberlin,
Ohio 44074
(corner of Ohio Routes 58 and 511)

For information call 440-775-8665.

MUSEUM HOURS

We regret that, due to COVID-19,
at this time the museum is open
only to visitors with an Oberlin
College ID who are participating
in the college's COVID-19 testing
program. Please check our website
for an announcement about when
the museum may reopen to the
general public.

VISIT US ONLINE

Website: amam.oberlin.edu
Instagram: @allenartmuseum
Facebook: [facebook.com/allenart-
museum/](https://facebook.com/allenart-museum/)

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emuseum/)

COVER: David Vinckboons (Dutch,
1576–ca. 1633), *Landscape with the
Baptism of the Eunuch* (detail),
1599–1600, pen and brown ink
with blue and gray wash, and white
heightening on paper. Friends of
Art Fund, 1950.124

RIGHT: Andy Warhol (American,
1928–1987), *Mao*, 1972, color silk-
screen. Gift of the artist in honor
of Ellen H. Johnson, 1975.54 B





The beginning of a new year always brings a healthy dose of optimism. Despite the many challenges we still face, it is a time to look forward to what we hope to do, as well as to look back and celebrate all we have achieved.

During 2020, the staff of the AMAM rose spectacularly to meet the moment, pivoting to produce virtual programs, develop a new website, and create an augmented reality tour of the galleries accessible to all. Staff members also devised new ways of working with Oberlin College faculty and students, as well as with K-12 students and teachers and the general public. While we look ahead with anticipation to the time we can once again welcome everyone back to the museum, we are grateful for the college's leadership on COVID testing and building-access protocols, which have kept our campus community, and by extension our town, relatively safe.

It's a particular pleasure to see some of our long-held traditions move forward in digital formats, even as we eagerly anticipate holding them in person again. The Education Department's Winter Term training of college students in museum practices will take place in the coming months using Zoom technology, a platform we've also used to connect with schoolchildren, and many of you, through our lectures and webinars. Similarly, our Office of Academic Programs, which last year piloted a program that equipped five OC students to give poster sessions on their research at the national conference of the College Art Association (CAA), this year will work with seven students who will make presentations at the CAA's remotely held conference, a signal honor. Other Oberlin students have completed curatorial assistantships at the museum or participated in a summer internship program, all working closely with museum staff to develop career readiness in an exceptionally difficult job market.

Museum registrars and preparators brilliantly reenvisioned our long-standing Art Rental practices, enabling students

to safely participate in this important Oberlin tradition during the program's 80th anniversary year. In addition, our collection curators continue their excellent work to creatively formulate exhibitions that showcase the breadth and depth of the museum's exceptional collection—as always, highlighting works from many of the world's cultures, bringing in new perspectives, and fostering discussion on challenging topics.

Installations for this academic year include one exploring how antiracism efforts can intersect with object interpretation and label writing, involving students in the process. Other exhibitions new this semester relate to humans' often-fraught relationship with the land and the objectification of women, among other topics.

While the pandemic has caused us to postpone what was to be a signature exhibition this academic year—on the drawings of artist Eva Hesse, whose

PHOTO BY DALE PRESTON



archive we hold—we are thrilled that the catalogue accompanying the show was named one of the Best Art Books of 2020 by the *New York Times*.

As we move forward with confidence and good cheer, the staff and I send you our warmest thanks for your support—it is what has enabled all that we do. Please do not hesitate to be in touch with us, and, until we meet again, stay well.

—Andria Derstine
John G.W. Cowles Director

Curator Alexandra Letvin (left), speaks about her exhibition on antiracist label writing in an August 2020 orientation for new members of the Oberlin faculty.



***Eva Hesse: Oberlin Drawings*, named a Best Art Book of 2020 by Roberta Smith of the *New York Times*, is available at amam.oberlin.edu. The related exhibition, postponed due to COVID, will take place at the Allen next year.**

Artworks chart the changing relationship between humans and the land since 1500.



Hercules Segers
(Dutch, 1589/90–
between 1633
and 1638),
*The Enclosed
Valley*, 1615–30,
etching on cloth
with washes.
**R. T. Miller Jr. and
Mrs. F. F. Prentiss
Funds, 1958.152**

Picturing the Land

Ripin Gallery, February 9–August 13, 2021

In 2000, chemist Paul Crutzen posed a controversial question: are we living in a new geological epoch in which humans have become the primary agents of planetary change? Have human actions had a global and irreversible environmental impact, fundamentally altering the Earth's surface and atmosphere?

Crutzen gave a name to this new epoch—the Anthropocene—and suggested it began in the late 1700s with the Industrial Revolution. Others have associated the beginning of the Anthropocene with alternate moments in human history: the development of agriculture thousands of years ago, the European colonization of the Americas in the 1500s, and the “Great Acceleration” of industry following World War II.

This exhibition of about 50 works, primarily from the AMAM collection of European art between 1500 and 1900, examines how artists have characterized the relationship



Howling Wolf
(Southern Cheyenne, 1849–
1927), “*Fight
Near Ft. Wallace*,”
1874–75, ink,
pencil, colored
pencil, crayon,
and watercolor on
ledger paper. Gift
of Mrs. Jacob D.
Cox, 1904.1180.9

between humans and the land. Landscape first emerged as an independent genre in European art around 1500, when growing populations and a lack of arable land led Europeans to embark on an unprecedented age of exploration, expansion, and exploitation. By 1900, decades of industrialization and urbanization had radically changed conceptions about the role of humans in shaping the natural world.

While it may be useful to consider how artistic approaches to the land have changed over time, this exhibition moves beyond a simple chronological progression of aesthetic movements. Instead, *Picturing the Land* explores how artists mediated and defined perceptions of the land: as a place devoid of humans, an imagined or real world, a locus of leisure and play, a site of labor, a source of food and sustenance, and a contested space to be colonized and defended by force.

Organized by Alexandra Letvin, assistant curator of European and American art, with assistance from Molly Bryson '20.

Contemporary artists embrace the play between text and image.

RIGHT: Jim Dine (American, b. 1935), *Cincinnati II* (detail), 1969, color lithograph. Gift of Jim Dine to mark the Centennial of the Allen Memorial Art Museum, 2016.26.77

David Wojnarowicz (American, 1954–1992) *Untitled*, from the portfolio *Seven Miles a Second*, 1993, silk-screen. Art Rental Collection Transfer, 2020.10

Language Arts
Ripin Gallery, February 9–August 13, 2021

Created in the last 50 years by a diverse range of artists, the works in this exhibition stage dynamic encounters between text and image.

Text plays a variety of roles in more than 30 prints, drawings, photographs, and posters. In the work of Jenny Holzer, it functions as a direct, often weaponized message. Text functions as a medium for conceptual artists Felix Gonzalez-Torres and Danh Vo. It's a source of description or competing information in photographic work by Jess Dugan, Alfredo Jaar, and Lorna Simpson. In prints by Analia Saban, Eduardo Paolozzi, and



Fred Tomaselli, it's a found object plucked from daily life. And, text becomes both subject and medium in works by Claes Oldenburg, Bruce Nauman, Sarah Charlesworth, and Robert Indiana.

Together, these explorations of text and image, or text as image, argue for their mutual interdependence, refusing the supremacy of one over the other.

Curated by Andrea Gyorody, Ellen Johnson '33 Assistant Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art, with assistance from Amy Baylis '20.

Prints depicting beauties of the “floating world” were complicit in exploitation of women.

Interrogating Beauties
Ripin Gallery, February 9–August 13, 2021

This show focuses on a genre of Japanese art, popular from the 18th to early 20th centuries, known today as “pictures of beauties,” or *bijinga*. Viewers may begin to call the simplicity of that term into question, however, as they discover the origin, reception, and evolution of this genre in the 25 prints presented.

Bijinga were created for the realm of popular entertainment known as the “floating world.” At its center was the city of Edo’s Yoshiwara district, an area designated for licensed prostitution. The Yoshiwara was home to a rich culture of literature, poetry, and visual and performing arts. Yet the district was also a space for the brutal exploitation of women and young men in a system of indentured sexual servitude. The origin of beauty pictures is similarly conflicted; these works were richly imagined by master artists, but, as advertisements for this floating world, were fully complicit in its harsh realities.



Utagawa Kuniyoshi (Japanese, 1797–1861), *Ageo: The Courtesan Takao of the Miuraya house Being Ransomed for Her Weight in Gold*, no. 6 from the series *The Sixty-nine Stations of the Kisokaido*, 1852, color woodblock print. Mary A. Ainsworth Bequest, 1950.594

As Japan became a global power in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, artists adapted to changing markets. The genre of pictures of beauties seemingly moved from promoting the commodification of women’s bodies to simply objectifying them for visual pleasure. But a more complex role for *bijinga*—one that reflected both women’s inner lives and their evolving roles in modern Japan—can be found in the frontispieces, or *kuchi-e*, made for popular novels and literary magazines.

Organized by Kevin R.E. Greenwood, Joan L. Danforth Curator of Asian Art.



Why does vulnerability tug at our heartstrings?

Beth Van Hoesen (American, 1926-2010), *Bugs*, 1985, aquatint, etching, and drypoint with roulette. Gift of the E. Mark Adams and Beth Van Hoesen Adams Trust, RC2012.1

Organized by Lucy Haskell '20, curatorial assistant in the Office of Academic Programs.



Cute

Education Hallway, February 9–July 2, 2021

The works in this exhibition incorporate things that are diminutive, wide-eyed, malleable, meek, soft, round, childish, playful—characteristics that may elicit a reaction of *aw, cute*. The unguarded softness of a supine cat, for instance, or the miniature familiarity of a dollhouse interior, may provoke passing sympathy or arouse deeper tenderness. When directed at an art object, even mild reactions reveal the dynamics of power, attraction, and

consumption that are latent in such a rote reaction to everyday things.

Cuteness is unassuming and domestic by nature, but it nevertheless manipulates our desire for fondness and affection. Stemming from the theory of the cute outlined in Sianne Ngai's *Our Aesthetic Categories*, this exhibition explores how cuteness can turn the tables on its subject and on the viewer, morphing desire into disgust and innocence into aggression. In each work, an element of softness, sweetness, or smallness exploits a common susceptibility to the vulnerable.

Newly acquired works highlight the synthesis of Indian and Persian culture in the Mughal Empire.

The Goddess Shield: Recent Acquisitions in South Asian Art
Southwest Ambulatory, February 9–September 10, 2021

This installation introduces two important additions to the AMAM collection: a small painting and a painted leather shield decorated with images of nine *shakti*, a type of goddess. Three related works from the collection highlight the dynamic synthesis of Indian and Persian culture that arose in South Asia during the Mughal Empire of the 16th to 19th centuries. This vast and powerful state ruled much of what is today India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Afghanistan.

The Mughals, who originated in Central Asia, had close ties with the Safavid rulers of Persia, today's Iran. Persian art and culture were revered at the Mughal court. Equally influential were the Rajput kingdoms of northern India. The blending of Persian and Indian traditions resulted, on a grand scale, in the Taj Mahal and, on a smaller scale, in works like the paintings and decorative art in the exhibition.

Organized by Kevin R.E. Greenwood,
Joan L. Danforth Curator of Asian Art.



TOP: Indian, Udaipur, Mewar, Rajasthan, *Goddess Shield*, ca. 1850–60, iron, painted leather, and gilding. R.T. Miller Jr. Fund, 2019.10. Photo courtesy of Runjeet Singh.

Rajput, *Raja Prithi Singh Meeting Zabardast Kahn*, mid-18th century, ink and opaque watercolor on paper. Bequest of Parks and Christie Campbell, 2020.17.21

Students safely celebrate the 80th anniversary of art rental at Oberlin.

FROM LEFT:

Students socially distance in the King Sculpture Court while waiting for their turn to rent works; lines remained steady throughout the day.

A student reads about his selection from the descriptive label on the back of a 1961 lithograph by Alberto Giacometti.



Students leaving the museum with artworks for their residences.

All photos by Jack Lichtenstein '23

THE ART RENTAL TRADITION, unbroken since the AMAM began loaning artworks to Oberlin students in 1940, looked uncertain last summer as the college prepared to safely welcome students back to campus during the pandemic.

Museum director Andria Derstine asked Lucille Stiger, the Allen's registrar, who has overseen Art Rental for more than 20 years, to come up with a plan that would allow the event to continue with social-distancing measures. "I wanted Oberlin students to have some sense of normalcy and continuity," says Derstine, noting that 2020 marked the

80th anniversary of the popular program.

Rather than pull out the 400-plus art rental works all at once—a practice that typically creates intense competition to be first in line to get the best selection—last fall the museum offered each student a selection of five works brought out at random. Students could arrive any time on September 12 and have an equally good chance at getting one of the most coveted works in the collection.

In addition, the museum waived the \$5 rental fee in order to minimize contact—a welcome perk during these challenging times.

"It definitely was a new experience," said Kate Luke '23. "As a first-year I did research ahead of time and made a list of the pieces I wanted, and I was one of the first 10 in line," said the Indiana native who is majoring in cinema studies and creative writing. "This year I just came and saw what called to me. It was like a surprise," she said.

Double-degree student Rachel Wolchak '22, of New York City, said in past years she has been among the first 20 students in line, and has gotten works by Miró and Picasso. "This year I could pick something that I really liked, and not just for the name."

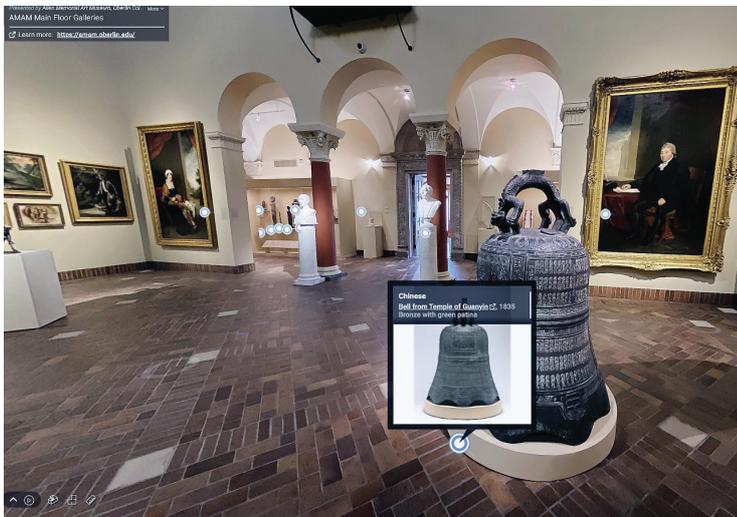


Museum Registrar Lucille Stiger (above right), who has overseen the Art Rental Program for the past 24 years, works the checkout line from behind a plexiglass shield.

Digital initiatives and touchable objects enhance access to collections.

Allen Augmented Reality offers a 3D experience of the museum from any device. The screen shot on the right shows the King Sculpture Court with an expanded view of the bronze *Bell from Temple of Guanyin*.

Try out the platform for yourself at bit.ly/aar_.



THE ALLEN IS WORKING ON multiple fronts to enhance access to museum collections through digital platforms. A new website was launched in September. An augmented-reality tour came online in October. And, this spring, the Education Department will introduce a cell-phone application featuring audio descriptions and label text for many works on view.

“These resources are intended to enhance access for people with differing abilities and to allow remote teaching during the pandemic and beyond,” said Jill Greenwood, Eric & Jane Nord Family Curator of Education.

The Allen Augmented Reality (AAR) platform lets people tour the galleries from any device. Users can zoom in on particular works, hear an audio description, read label text, or watch a related video. “Unlike virtual reality, no goggles are required,” said Alyssa Traster, who developed AAR as a curatorial assistant in the Education Department with funding from a Freeman Asian Arts & Culture Initiative grant from the Freeman Foundation.

Traster took hundreds of individual scans that were digitally “stitched” together to produce a three-dimensional view of galleries on the mu-

seum’s main floor. “This gives visitors the ability to navigate around a work of art as if they were really there,” she said.

“We’re changing the ways we connect schools to the museum,” Greenwood said. With AAR, a second-grade class that normally visits six times a year was able to see artworks even with the museum closed.

A cell-phone application will replace the audio wands that had been available at the front desk. Visitors will use their own devices; people who need accommodations to access audio and visual content often have applications installed on their phones already, or have special devices. Also, tablets will be available to check out.

“This has been a long-term goal of mine,” said Greenwood. The application will first launch with the audio descriptions previously on the wands, and later include large-font label text and high-verbal audio descriptions of some works of art for visitors with vision impairment.

With funding from the Freeman Foundation, the Education Department, along with Kevin R. E. Greenwood, Joan L. Danforth Curator of Asian Art, has also produced a series of three videos on Asian works in the collection, offered online teacher workshops that attracted participants from multiple states, and presented on their work at a national conference last November.



This Buddha sculpture is part of a new touch collection of 54 objects that was established with a grant from the Freeman Foundation. Once it is safe to do so, the objects will be used in teaching K-12 and college classes, as well as in public programs, including those for people with vision loss.

Museum launches new website: amam.oberlin.edu

The Allen’s website has a new look and greater functionality, including the ability to order merchandise or renew your membership online. Megan Harding, manager of publications, membership, and media, collaborated with

other museum staff and the FORM Group of Cleveland to redesign the site and update its content for greater visual appeal and ease of navigation. We encourage you to visit the site for news and updates!

Another way to stay abreast of AMAM news: join our e-newsletter list by sending a subscribe message to member.amam@oberlin.edu.

Learn about wetlands, *wabi-sabi*, and more as the Allen Online series continues.

Webinars and Zoom sessions require advance registration. Videos will be available on our Vimeo and Facebook pages.

Visit our website at amam.oberlin.edu for event details and registration.

BELOW RIGHT: Japanese, Korean-style Teabowl with *Prunus Design*. Gift of Beatrice and Yvonne Lanyi, 1957.44



Shana Klein

The Allen Online series offers programs at 3 p.m. on first and third Thursdays of the month.

January 21—video

Lucy Haskell '20, curatorial assistant in academic programs, discusses her exhibition *Cute*, which brings together AMAM works that incorporate softness, sweetness, or smallness to probe our own weakness for vulnerability.

February 4—webinar

Although paintings brimming with fresh fruit give an optimistic portrait of the nation after the American Civil War, pictures of food were not always pleasant or neutral. Shana Klein, assistant professor of art history at Kent State University, presents "Fighting with Fruit: Resisting Slavery and Racism in Still-Life Painting" in conjunction with the installation *How can Museum Labels be Antiracist*. She discusses how African-American artists used food in art to combat racism and resist slavery. Alexandra Letvin, assistant curator of European and American art, moderates a Q&A after the talk.

February 18—video

Do old, weathered, and broken things have their own special beauty? What are *wabi-sabi* and *kintsugi*? They are Japanese terms for an aesthetic principle and for a way of repairing ceramics. Kevin R. E. Greenwood, Joan L. Danforth Curator of Asian Art, uses examples from the AMAM collection to illustrate these terms.

February 20, 1:00 and 1:30 p.m.

Community Day continues with kits you can use at home as you follow along on Zoom! Local artist-in-residence Mari Kuroda leads an art-making activity related to her native culture of Japan, and its plum-blossom and bamboo motifs. Embrace the unexpected, find beauty in imperfection (*wabi-sabi*), and revere the natural world in this program titled "Perfect Imperfections: Nature in Japanese Ceramics." Please register online before February 15 and we will mail you a free kit.



Kuroda leads an art-making activity related to her native

March 4—video

This talk introduces an important museum acquisition, the *Goddess Shield* (see page 11). This beautifully painted shield, made in northern India in the mid-19th century, is covered with images of warrior goddesses. But why? What did they represent? And who would have owned it? Join Kevin R. E. Greenwood, Joan L. Danforth Curator of Asian Art, for this lively presentation.

March 18—webinar

Annie Storr '75, resident scholar at Brandeis University, gives a presentation on activist and social reformer Ellen Gates Starr, who lobbied in favor of the inscription on the museum's 1917 façade: "The Cause of Art is the Cause of the People," an 1884 quote by William Morris. Museum Director Andria Derstine moderates an interactive Q&A following Storr's talk.

April 1—webinar

In 19th-century America, marshes and swamps were considered wastelands that stood in the way of progress. But some painters chose these unusual environments as subjects in the Civil War era. In a talk titled "Painting the American Wasteland," Maggie Cao, assistant professor of art

history, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, explores how American wetlands were depicted before they were recognized as vital ecosystems. Cosponsored by the Presidential Initiative on Food Insecurity funded by a New President's grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.



Maggie Cao



April 15—video

To give Oberlin College students practical experience in a museum context, each year the Allen hosts a research paper presentation. Students from any discipline may submit an abstract related to a work of art in the collection. The recipient of the Student Paper Award will present their research in this program.

Events for May, June, and July will be announced on our website and Facebook page.

Works depicting American wetlands, such as the Thomas Moran etching *Passaic Meadows* (above), will be discussed in an April 1 webinar. Preregistration is required.

Exhibitions continue with new works, new labels written by students.

Students Engage with *How can Museum Labels be Antiracist?*
NW Ambulatory, through September 10

On November 1, nine Oberlin students attended the AMAM’s first curatorial workshop on museum interpretation, led by assistant curators Alexandra Letvin (European and American art) and Hannah Kinney (academic programs). After an introduction to the paintings on view in *How can Museum Labels be Antiracist?*, students worked in small groups to compose alternative labels for the works.

Many Oberlin students are interested in how museums determine the stories they tell with their collections. In response, Kinney and Letvin invited students to share their perspectives on two paintings in this exhibition and become public interpreters of the collection. You can hear two students reading their labels from the workshop in the video “A Closer Look: Severin Roesen & Thomas Satterwhite Noble” at vimeo.com/amam.

Do It Again: Repetition as Artistic Strategy, 1945 to Now
Ellen Johnson Gallery, through July 2

This show continues in 2021 with a fresh rotation of works: paintings by Joseph Albers and Jenifer K Wofford; prints by Felix Gonzales-Torres and Andy Warhol; and photographs by

Dawoud Bey, Genevieve Gaignard, Sherrie Levine, Richard Prince, Cindy Sherman, Jeff Wall, and others. Through their use of repetition and appropriation, many of the artists comment on the violence and bias prevalent in popular culture.

The Enchantment of the Everyday: East Asian Decorative Arts from the Permanent Collection
Stern West, through September 3, 2021

This exhibition continues with the addition of two large and spectacular Chinese decorative embroideries, the work of highly skilled but anonymous women. One features a magical scene in a garden utopia and the other a collection of delicately rendered flowers, all rich in symbolic meaning.

Also on view is a saddle rug from Inner Mongolia that is covered with lucky Buddhist motifs, a Korean chest decorated with inlaid wood, and an adjustable lamp stand from Korea, cleverly carved in the shape of a dragon.



Support our programs—join today or renew your membership online.

MEMBERS OF OUR FRIENDS of art group provide crucial support for art purchases, exhibitions, and public programs. As a Friend of Art, you will receive the membership benefits listed below. Most importantly, your support will help the museum to maintain an active and vital presence in the local community and beyond.

If you have already joined, thank you. If not, please consider joining us at whichever level of giving is right for you. We have expanded our ROAM program, which provides reciprocal member benefits at more than 400 institutions across the nation.

For your convenience, you can purchase memberships online at amam.oberlin.edu.



Photo by Yvonne Gay

Membership Level	Eligibility and Benefits	Annual Dues
Individual	Members receive: one membership card, twice-yearly newsletter, 20 percent discount on AMAM merchandise, notification of museum events and exhibition openings, and reciprocal benefits at more than 40 college and university museums nationwide.	\$50
Student	Student members receive all of the basic benefits listed above. Open to Oberlin College students and alumni within five years of graduation.	\$20
Family/Dual	<i>Benefits for two adults and all children under age 18 living at the same address</i> Receive two membership cards providing access to all of the individual membership benefits.	\$75
Supporting	<i>As above, plus:</i> free admission and/or discounted merchandise at 15 museums in the Ohio Museum Reciprocal Membership Program.	\$150+
Patrons Circle	<i>As above, plus:</i> Member privileges and discounts at more than 400 institutions nationwide through the ROAM.	\$500+
Director’s Circle	<i>As above, plus:</i> advance notice of museum travel programs sponsored in concert with the Oberlin Alumni Association.	\$1,000+
Collectors Circle	<i>Exclusive benefit:</i> Members at this level may make an appointment annually for a personalized experience with an AMAM staff member, in addition to all of the above-listed benefits.	\$2,500+

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