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n the decades after World War II there was much discussion about the need for collaboration between the architect and artist either as embodied in one or as distinctly different creative talents working closely but creatively independently together. Many saw little actual collaboration and questioned the relationship artistically or saw art as a cover for otherwise bland architecture. However, architects like Wallace K. Harrison, Gordon Bunshaft, and others worked regularly with artists like Josef Albers, Isamu Noguchi, Gyorgy Kepes or Richard Lippold. While many of those art installations remain today, they are under constant pressure because of real estate changes, renovations or simply neglect.

By Theodore Prudon

HE two decades directly after World War II in New York City saw a great deal of interaction, theoretically and practically, between architects and artists. The work of many modern artists was incorporated in corporate office buildings, office complexes and public spaces constructed during that time period. What the precise working relationships were and the reason why these artworks were incorporated was a subject of some discussion then and, to some extent, remains so today. Whatever those discussion were, many are still *in situ* and in good condition but are not always fully appreciated or recognized by those owning the building or those walking past. As a practice art continues to be incorporated today and, probably, some of the same questions and dilemmas remain.

Artist and architect

One of the principal points of discussions in the 1940s and 1950s was about what the relationship between architects and artists should be and what the different creative responsibilities ought to be. In the theoretical discussions about art and architecture then the dialogue was frequently found to refer to earlier times when the skills were not separated (i.e. the architect/artist was one and the same person) or, if separate, the work process of the participants was seen as more integrated and collaborative. Art and architecture from the past was held up as the aesthetic and collaborative ideal that was to be achieved in the present time between architect and artist. In the dialogues the work of the architect/artist was seen as exemplified by such Renaissance or Mannerist sculptors like Michelangelo (1475-1564) and Jacopo Sansovino (1486-1570) and the painter Guilio Romano (1499-1564). (figures 1, 2).¹ In terms of collaboration the building of the cathedrals was touted as the desired example or in the words of Walter Gropius (1883-1969): "True collaboration must start from scratch, the members of the group stimulating each other, conceiving the idea in mutual exchange as the builders of the old cathedrals who were living at the site devoting their life to the task."²

It is important to note that earlier distinctions between the architecture, arts or science disciplines were less formalized and crossovers between architecture and various other disciplines—not just design—were quite common. For instance, Christopher Wren (1632–1723), the architect of St. Paul's Cathedral was trained as an astronomer and mathematician and William Thornton (1759–1828), the winner of the competition for the design of the US Capitol Building in Washington DC was trained as a physician before turning to architecture as his métier.

With the emergence of architecture as a more established discipline and the introduction of formal education and the establishment of licensing and registration requirements, the interdisciplinary crossovers become more difficult and less frequent. The impact of the professionalization is acknowledged in the literature and is reflected in the argument that the realities of practice and the complexity of architecture has necessitated a (technical) specialization beyond architecture as simply a visual or sculptural art. However, in spite of the emergence of architecture as a formalized discipline, which is only of recent vintage and in most countries dates from the nineteenth century, the examples of earlier periods are continued to be referred to but are probably only of limited value in reality. It is the inherent conflict between the desire for the relationships of the past and the realities of twentieth century practice that permeates the discussions.

In the early postwar years the consensus among architects and artists—while working together—seems to have been that little or no real collaboration existed nor that any true integration had taken place.³ The question as to what that collaboration or integration ought to be was never very clear and different points of view were offered. Walter Gropius in his essay "The Curse of Conformity" argues for the artist to be a full member of the design and creative production team. In his work in the Graduate Center at Harvard and later in the former PanAm Building (now MetLife Building) it would appear that artists





Figure 1. **Guilio Romano**, Palazzo Te, Mantua, 1524–1534. Designed by Romano (1499–1546) for Federico II Gonzaga. Photo by Paolo Boni.

Figure 2. **Guilio Romano**, portrait of Alexander the Great. Private collection and copyright reserved.

Figure 3. **Gordon Bunshaft** (SOM), IBM Headquarters, Armonk, 1964. The north interior court and its sculptures named *Garden* of *the Future* is the work of Isamu Noguchi. Photo by Theodore Prudon.

Figure 4. **Gordon Bunshaft** (SOM), IBM Headquarters, Armonk, 1964. The design of the south interior court and its sculptures named *Garden of the Past* is the work of Isamu Noguchi. Photo by Theodore Prudon.



were brought into the design process early but that the commissions had probably little influence on the actual design or layout of the spaces.⁴ In the discussion with other architects and artists Gropius still, extensively, quotes, Jean Gorin's La Synthèse des arts majeurs est-elle possible?: "Del Marie said in 1952 that the question was no longer one of ornamental polychromy, something decorative, something fundamentally sensory, which would harmonize with the styles of the centuries, but rather one of an architectural polychromy, sprung from the newest evolutions of painting and architecture, a modern polychromy, characterized by rationalism, the flagrant sign of our period. Architectural polychromy was not to be considered as an adjunct to architecture, to be more or less necessary at will; it could not let the color stand in a secondary position vis-à-vis the plan. Indeed, it did not relate to the plan but rather to space. It was not enough to put plaques of color on asbestos cement. The synthesis of the arts cannot consist in putting sculpture and painting in appropriate architectural locations or even natural ones, even when they are very appropriate, because that is, when all is said and done, nothing but the program of a museum. We believe that the true synthesis of the arts is to be found in the architectural work itself and commences from the first stages of the conception."5

The relationship between architect and artist in the creation of corporate and public spaces was interpreted differently, as is to be expected, by the three participating groups: architects, artists and general public. For instance, Ada-Louise Huxtable (b. 1921), the former architecture critic of *The New York Times*, argued that the incorporation of modern art into modern architecture was only intended to soften the austerity and blandness of modern buildings.⁶ Furthermore, in defining the role of the architect, she referred back to history and quotes Vitruvius: "Almost 2,000 years ago, Vitruvius said of the architect, 'It is by his judgment that all the work done by the other art is put to the test'."⁷

With regards to the position of the architect Peter Blake (1920-2006) expressed a somewhat similar point of view. He dismissed the Renaissance and Mannierist periods as precedent because those periods were 'autocratic' and no longer applicable. He also argued that because the structure—what he called point supported making a conceptual distinction between modern frame architecture and historic load bearing masonry construction—had become so important that the boundaries had to be set by the architect but he did advocate leaving as much freedom to the artists as possible while acknowledging that the divergence of opinions was a result of our democratic not autocratic society.⁸ Gropius once again, facing the realities of practice, agreed with that definition of the role of the architect: "If architects should have deluded themselves and others into believing that they hold positions of autocratic leadership, they cannot be living in the worldlknow. Anybody who has undertaken to steer a client toward architectural solutions which would transcend the merely practical and economical approach knows that he will have his hands full without trying to add proposals for collaboration with painters and sculptors."⁹

Opinions among the artists are more diverse but did not necessarily appreciate the dominating role of the architect. Whether the display of their art was more important than the limitations placed on their work as some did suggest, some artists did not agree and did not their creativity limited in any form.¹⁰ According to Isamu Noguchi (1904–1988) the sculptors Henri Moore (1898–1986) and David Smith (1906–1965) did not want to accept any limitations, unlike himself who sought to work with the architect.¹¹ In his own words: "I have taken another attitude in that, as I think everything is relative in size and it's all a question of relative scale, I have come to feel that sculpture can only be of significance to architecture and to the space of human environment as something conclusive in relation to that space."

But even Noguchi towards the end of his life expressed his frustration with architects and began to echo some of the earlier criticism of art in public spaces: "To say that my work has been a collaborative effort is not, however, quite correct. I think that what most architects want from a sculptor is an embellishment, not exactly a collaboration with each making his own separate contributions."¹²

The sculptor Richard Lippold (1915-2002) went even a step further in that he sought the public, the spectator as the third collaborator in the execution: "A finished building with its sculpture, painting and other 'adornments', stands most successfully when it is 'incomplete', waiting like a poem, to be read. If the picture presented to the user is so complete as to exclude him, to be looked at from a distance, every detail of space, scale, and equipment so complete in itself that it substitutes for the man who would enter, then I believe that a true collaboration of 'three' has failed."¹³

Whatever their individual points of view, it would seem that a number of architects developed good working relationships with a number of artists and to whom they returned frequently when commissioning a work of art or installation in a particular location. In some instances those collaborations appeared to be more than a simple commission. Noguchi in particular seemed to have developed close collaborations with architects like Gordon Bunshaft (1909–1990) and Wallace K. Harrison (1895–1981), both of whom were modern art collectors and aficionados in their own right.¹⁴ In this period art, in the corporate and institutional context, was displayed in three ways: one, as sculpture in front of buildings on plazas and in gardens; two, as a sculptural application inside either freestanding or attached to walls or ceilings; and three, as paintings or murals applied to walls or even ceilings.

The use of sculpture in both plazas and gardens was quite widespread and in many locations appears to remain largely intact. For instance, Noguchi worked all across the United States and his work with Gordon Bunshaft of SOM in the interior courts of the original IBM Headquarters in Armonk is both sculpture and landscape (figures 3, 4)¹⁵ or the installation sunken in the plaza of the Chase Manhattan Building in lower Manhattan.¹⁶ In a few instances, in the corporate suburban settings, the entire surroundings of corporate facilities were turned into a sculpture park. However, the future of some of these complexes is in question as the business, the role and the position of the American corporation in society has substantially changed.¹⁷

In Manhattan itself many of the corporate buildings received lobbies and other spaces with art work installed mostly on walls. As noted the few architects designing these buildings seemed to have been working mostly with the same group of abstract artists, among them: Josef Albers (1888–1976), Isamu Noguchi (1904–1988),



Figure 5. Gordon Bunshaft (SOM), branch bank (formerly Manufacturers Trust and most recently Chase), New York, 1954. In the second floor banking hall a screen designed by **Harry Bertoia** is partially visible from the street. Photo by Theodore Prudon.

Figure 6. **Gordon Bunshaft** (SOM), branch bank (formerly Manufacturers Trust and most recently Chase), New York, 1954. The screen as installed originally by **Harry Bertoia** separated the bank's customers from the bank's officers. Photo by Ezra Stoller © Esto.







Harry Bertoia (1915–1978), Richard Lippold (1915–2002) and Gyorgy Kepes (1909–1989).

The former Manufacturer's Trust Company branch bank, 510 Fifth Avenue, designed by Gordon Bunshaft and completed in 1954, housed until recently a branch of Chase bank and was, at the time, considered an innovation in banking design.¹⁸ The metal and glass curtain wall made the entire interior transparent and the main vault was directly on the street and was opened daily for everyone to see (figure 5). This was in direct contrast to earlier banking design that with its heavy stone facades and metal grates symbolized the safety of the bank and its deposits. In the interior on the second floor the public banking hall was separated from the office space at the western end of the floor by one of Harry Bertoia's distinctive metal screens (figure 6). The screen, made of steel fused on the surface with bronze, copper and nickel, does remain and is partially visible from the street.¹⁹ However, the bank no longer occupies the building and the space at the end of 2009 was offered for lease as a "big box retail opportunity" making it unclear what will be the fate of the interior in general and the screen in particular.²⁰

The Tishman Building at 666 Fifth Avenue, designed by the corporate firm of Carson & Lundin and completed



Figure 7. **Carson & Lundin**, office building, New York, 666 Fifth Avenue, 1957. A wall installation designed by **Isamu Noguchi** (c. 1956–1958) and titled *Waterfall* faced the Fifth Avenue entrance originally. The sculpture remains in the same location but, because the original entrance was converted into retail, the sculpture it is seen somewhat than intended by **Noguchi**.

Figure 8. **Carson & Lundin**, office building, New York, 666 Fifth Avenue, 1957. The sculpture named Waterfall is accompanied by a ceiling design, also by **Isamu Noguchi** (c. 1956–1958), suggesting the movement of water. The ceiling remains in its original location.

Photos from The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum, New York. in 1957, has in its lobby a wall installation by Isamu Noguchi called the "Waterfall" and a ceiling installation in the elevator lobbies with undulating white metal scrims that recall the rippling effect of water that was also intended to run on the ridged glass wall behind the vertical stainless steel scrims of the "Waterfall" in the main lobby (figures 7, 8).²¹ The original building plan had an arcade coming from Fifth Avenue towards the entrance and elevator core. The "Waterfall" was the focal point over the full width of that arcade and visible from Fifth Avenue. Both elements of the sculptural installation are in place but in a 1990s renovation, the arcade to Fifth Arcade was closed and converted to retail, a very valuable commodity on the avenue.²² The building is now only entered from the side streets, which has changed how the sculpture is approached and seen (obliquely rather than frontal when entering the building) and thus experienced differently. This installation is also different than many of the others in that it is not a mere installation but attempts to shape the entire environment suggesting a closer working relationship than an assignment to just fill the assigned space as was so often suggested for the work of these artists.

The Time Life Building on Avenue of the Americas, designed by Wallace Harrison then of the firm Harrison & Abramowitz & Harris, contains in its lobby the work of the major modern artists, Fritz Glarner (1899-1972) and Josef Albers (1888-1976). In the east corridor is a mural by Glarner, titled "Relational Painting #88", and in the west corridor is a low relief by Albers named "Portals". Both artworks are located on the wall of the core, which determined the dimensions of each from the very beginning. Glarner had initially prepared a maquette of his design for the two-story interior of the Time Inc. Reception Center but a reduced version was installed in the lobby.²³ The multi-colored geometric mural remains. Harrison had known Albers since the 1930s and worked with him also on the white marble relief titled "Two Constellations" in the lobby of the Corning Glass Works Building on Fifth Avenue in Manhattan. "Portals" in its geometry is reminiscent of the studies "Homage to the Square" and is made from strips and plates of nickel, and beige and white Carrara glass with the intent, according to Albers's own words, to "create a surface of receding squares, which, in two dimensions, gives a sense of depth to the wall."²⁴ The two other elements distinctive in this lobby are the floor with its swirling terrazzo pattern, most likely inspired by Brazilian examples, and the dark maroon ceiling made of glass tiles and incorporating the lighting. In the renovation of the lobby of the building the murals remained and the ceiling was carefully restored.²⁵

Probably one of the most interesting cases is presented



Figure 9. Emory Roth & Sons (architects of record), in collaboration with Walter Gropius and Pietro Belluschi (design consultants), former PanAm Building (now Metlife Building), New York, 1963. The mural *Manhattan*, designed by Josef Albers, shown here in its original location over the escalators into Grand Central Terminal, was removed in a 2002 lobby renovation and placed in storage, where it remains awaiting restoration and reinstallation in an appropriate location. Photo © The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation. by the artwork in the former PanAm Building, now MetLife Building. A well-documented history of the collaboration between the architects of record Emory Roth & Sons with Walter Gropius and Pietro Belluschi (1899–1994) as design consultants is particularly of interest because it addresses the participation of several major artists.²⁶ Josef Albers, Richard Lippold and Gyorgy Kepes were invited as early as December 1960 to participate, almost three



years before the building was completed in 1963. Albers created a large mural named "Manhattan" over the escalators into Grand Central Terminal (figure 9), Richard Lippold did one of his wire sculptures in the Vanderbilt Street lobby and Gyorgy Kepes designed aluminum screens around the information desk. Upon completion the building itself was greatly disliked by the general public.²⁷ As a result since 1963 the lobby spaces have seen two renovations, first in 1987 when the modernist décor was substantially changed into what could be best called neo-Egyptian and a subsequent renovation in 2002 that removed the 1987 additions and returned a more modernist architectural vocabulary.

With the 2002 renovation the Albers mural was dismantled by the building owners with the stated intent of creating more light access in that end of the building. The mural has remained in storage with the intent of being reinstalled in some other location or to serve as a model for a reconstructed version elsewhere. This outcome was by no means satisfactory.²⁸ On the other hand the Richard Lippold sculpture has remained in its prominent location in the Vanderbilt Avenue lobby and was carefully restored.²⁹

From the few examples reviewed it would seem that most of the artwork has survived reasonably well in the different locations so far in spite of real estate and management pressures. The preservation issues, however, remain quite complex as some of the case studies demonstrate not only because of the difficulty in maintaining and restoring the actual artwork but also in respecting its original intent and context. Where the removal of the Albers mural in Grand Central raises the question of how important the location is if the artwork is to be considered site specific and not just a 'painting on the wall', the reorientation of the lobby entrances at 666 Fifth Avenue maintains the sculpture but changes its experience entirely.

Not surprisingly the debate about the integration of the arts into architecture continues unabated in the next generation of architects and focuses today not as much on the collaborative aspect but more on individuals seeing themselves as both architects and artists and claiming that earlier tradition. Michael Graves (b. 1934), Frank Gehry (b. 1929), Frank Stella (b. 1936) and others make that point when discussing their work.³⁰ Or in the words of Graves: "No one ever would have thought to ask Raphael if he were a painter or a sculptor or an architect. I don't make a great distinction between those aspects of my work."³¹

Notes

- Reference to the work of these early artists is made in about all the publications and articles from the postwar period dealing with the collaboration or the perceived lack thereof between architects and artists.
- See the article documenting a conversation (arranged by John E. Burchard) between Pietro Belluschi, Harry Bertoia, Reg Butler, Eduardo Chillida, Jimmy Ernst, Walter Gropius, Le Corbusier, Richard Lippold, Walter Netsch, Irene Rice Pereira, José Luis Sert, "Views on Art and Architecture: A Conversation," Daedalus, Vol. 89, No. 1 (1960): 73.
- The architects and artists Pietro Belluschi, Harry Bertoia, Reg Butler, Eduardo Chillida, Jimmy Ernst, Walter Gropius, Le Corbusier, Richard Lippold, Walter Netsch, Irene Rice Pereira, José Luis Sert extensively discuss the relationship between architect and artists, all expressing a great of dissatisfaction. See "Views on Art and Architecture: A Conversation": 62–73.
- 4. As quoted in Meredith L. Clausen, The PanAm Building and the Shattering of the Modernist Dream (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005), 141. Clausen also refers to a New York Times' article that marvels at how much leeway the artists were given in the design of murals and sculptures. The book is a comprehensive study of how the building came about, its significance and the subsequent perceptions.
- See "Views on Art and Architecture: A Conversation": 62-73. For the text of the quote Gropius refers to his own mimeographed copy.
- See Ada-Louise Huxtable, "Art with Architecture: New Terms of an Old Alliance," New York Times (September 13, 1959).
- 7. Ibid. As also quoted in Clausen, The PanAm Building, 142.
- See Peter Blake, "Architecture: Plain or Fancy?", Design Quarterly (Walker Art Center) 30 (1954): 23-27. This is one of the few publications at the time that makes a direct reference to the work of Le Corbusier. He illustrates his article with images of the rooftop of the Unité d'habitation in Marseilles.
- 9. See "Views on Art and Architecture: A Conversation": 73.
- See the introduction by Henry-Russell Hitchcock in SOM Architecture of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill 1950–1962 (New York,

Washington: Frederick Praeger, 1963), 13 where he suggests that most independent painters rather see their work on the walls of public spaces than in closed private collections.

- See Isamu Noguchi, "The Sculptor and the Architect," Studio International 176 (1968): 18–22. He writes that Moore and Smith "despise" architects but he himself is different, which he believes was the result of his work with Martha Graham for whom he designed a number of stage sets.
- As quoted in Elizabeth Dean Hermann, "La collaborazione di Wallace K. Harrison e Isamu Noguchi," Casabella 66, 701 (June 2002). On pages 106–107 is the English summary of the article
- 13. See "Views on Art and Architecture: A Conversation": 70.
- 14. With Bunshaft Noguchi did work on a substantial number of commissions, ranging from an installation in the Lever House courtyard (not executed) to the courtyards of Chase Manhattan, Connecticut General and IBM. For an overview of his landscape and courtyard designs, see Martin Friedman, "Noguchi's Imaginary Landscapes," Design Quarterly (Walker Art Center) 106/107 (1978): 1-3-99. With Harrison his collaboration had started with work in Rockefeller Center. See Victoria Newhouse, Wallace K. Harrison, architect (New York: Monacelli Press, 1989), 154-159. It is interesting to note that the book mentions Noguchi only once. Harrison and Noguchi worked closely on two houses for William A.M. Burden, one in Westchester and one in North Harbor, Maine. See Dean Hermann, "La collaborazione di Wallace K. Harrison e Isamu Noguchi", 56-67. In the house in Maine Noguchi was deeply involved in shaping the space to capture the reflections of light and movement of the water, a theme that was also present in other work including the Waterfall in the Tishman Building and the various fountains he designed. However, it appears that in the literature Harrison got the entire credit for the design of the house and Noguchi was only recognized for some pieces of furniture. The house in North Harbor burned down but was reconstructed recently resembling as closely as possible the original. See Heinrich Hermann, "'Sea Change': re-creation as preservation, coast of Maine," Int/AR: Interventions/Adaptive Use 1 (Autumn 2009).

- 15. See "IBM Headquarters Building [Armonk, N.Y.]," Arts and Architecture 82 (1965): 34-35. The courtyards are described in the article as: "The two gardens are heavy with symbolism. According to Noguchi, the south garden's naturalist setting of trees and rocks represent man's past; the north garden symbolizes man's future in science and space. The abstract bronze sculpture balanced precariously in defiance of gravity in the center of the north garden, represents the intertwining of genes linking man to his past. Both gardens are 70 x 165'."
- 16. The installation is described as: "Set in a glass-walled well 16 ft below the plaza level, the 'water garden', as Noguchi calls it, consists of a 60-ft diameter pool, fountain, sinuously patterned paving of granite cubes, and seven basalt rocks selected from the bottom of the Uji River in Japan. Noguchi has placed these rocks atop rises in the topography of the composition, recalling the traditional Japanese garden creations of the seas, islands, and mountains in miniature." See "A Lung for New York's Financial District," Progressive Architecture 45 (1964): 214–215. Because the sculpture is below the level of the plaza, it is only visually accessible from that level but can also be seen from the branch bank and lobby on the level below the plaza.
- For an overview of some of those suburban locations, see, for instance, David W. Dunlap, "The Office as Architectural Touchstone," New York Times (March 2, 2008).
- See "Modern architecture breaks through the glass barrier," Architectural Forum 101, 12 (December 1954): 104.
- For a description of the screen and its construction, see "Metal Sculpture-Harry Bertoia," Arts and Architecture 72, 1 (January 1952): 18-19.
- 20. The building is designated a New York City Landmark.
- For a description of the original installation, see "Unusual Design For Office Lobby: Sculptor to Do Layout for Entrance to Skyscraper at 666 Fifth Avenue," New York Times (January 15, 1956) or Glenn Fowler, "Work of Noted Artists Graces Office Building Lobbies," New York Times (August 17, 1958).
- There was some question at the time whether the sculpture would be changed. See David W. Dunlap, "50's Tower to Be Fitted for

90's Retail," New York Times (October 15, 1997).

- 23. See NYC Landmark Preservation Commission Designation Report, Designation List 338, LP 2119, 6, which states: "To convince Luce that a work of art would be preferable, 'art loving Wally Harrison' built a scale model of the reception center to illustrate various solutions: When all was quiet, the overhead lights were dimmed, the lights in the model went up and Voila! there all glowing in all its pristine glory was Mr. Glarner's sketch." In this context it is interesting to note the increased use of models and mockups for corporate presentations of designs and design concepts, see Alexandra Lange, "This Year's Model: Representing Modernism to the Post-war American Corporation," Journal of Design History 19, 3 (2006): 233-255.
- As quoted in NYC Landmark Preservation Commission Designation Report, Designation List 338, LP 2119, 6.
- See David Dunlap, "Press 'L' for Landmark; Time & Life Lobby, a 50's Gem, Awaits Recognition," New York Times (June 17, 2002).
- For a discussion of the selection, interaction and collaboration between the owner, architect and artists, see Clausen, The PanAm Building, 141–153.
- See Richard David Story, "The Buildings New Yorkers Love to Hate," New York Magazine (June 15, 1987): 32. The PanAm Building was number one.
- Carol Vogel, "A Familiar Mural Finds Itself Without a Wall," New York Times (July 9, 2001).
- Eve M. Kahn, "Wired: Preserving the Installations of Richard Lippold," New York Times (January 9, 2009).
- 30. See, for instance, Richard Lacayo, "Frank Stella: The Artist as Architect," Time (July 17, 2007) or Benjamin Genocchio, "Architect as Artist," New York Times (November 23, 2008), where the writer comments: "I get the feeling that with these sketches, not to mention museum exhibitions, he has an eye on posterity, self-consciously creating a paper trail that reinforces for the viewer the idea of art and individual artistry as the basis of his buildings."
- See Marilyn Bethany, "Design: The Architect as Artist," New York Times (April 25, 1982).

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