

MODERN ART

The visual art of the early twentieth century constitutes the most radical assault on tradition ever launched in the history of world art. Liberated by the camera from the necessity of imitating nature, **avant-garde** artists turned away from pictorial representation. They

pioneered abstract, "stripped-down" styles that—like Imagist poetry—worked to capture the intrinsic and essential meaning of their subjects. They reenvisioned the physical world by way of a new formal language that evoked (rather than described) experience.



Figure 14.9 Pablo Picasso, *Les Femmes d'Alger (O Version O)*, 1936. Oil on canvas, 8 ft. × 7 ft. 8 in.

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Picasso and Cubism

The giant of the Modernist revolution was the Spanish-born Pablo Picasso (1881–1973). During his ninety-two-year life, Picasso worked in almost every major art style of the century, some of which he himself inaugurated. He produced thousands of paintings, drawings, sculptures, and prints—a body of work that in its size, inventiveness, and influence is nothing short of phenomenal.

In 1903, the young painter left his native Spain to settle in Paris. There, in the bustling capital of the Western art world, he came under the influence of Impressionist and Postimpressionist painting, taking as his subjects café life, beggars, prostitutes, and circus folk. Picasso worked to refine form and color in the direction of concentrated expression, reducing the colors of his palette first to various shades of blue and then, after 1904, to tones of rose. By 1906, however, he began to abandon traditional Western modes of pictorial representation. Adopting the credo that art must be subversive—that it must defy all that is conventional, literal, and trite—he initiated a bold new style. That style was shaped by two major forces: Cézanne's paintings, which had been the focus of two large Paris exhibitions; and the arts of Africa, Iberia, and Oceania, examples of which were appearing regularly in the work of Gauguin (see Figure 13.24), in local galleries, and at the Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadéro in Paris. In Cézanne's canvases (see Figures 13.28 and 13.29), Picasso recognized a rigorous new language of form that worked to define nature's underlying structure. And in African and Oceanic sculpture he discovered a unique synthesis of expressive abstraction and dynamic distortion.

Both influences contributed to Picasso's monumental *Demoiselles d'Avignon* (Figure 14.9 and see Figure 14.11), the landmark Modernist painting of the early twentieth century. The five

nude women—prostitutes of a Spanish bordello—occupy a shallow space consisting of fractured planes of color—brick rose and vivid blues—that resemble shards of broken glass. At least three of the figures are rendered from multiple viewpoints—as if observed by an eye that traveled freely in time and space. The body of the crouching female on the far right is viewed from the back, while her face, savagely striated like the scarification of an African mask (see Figure 9.8), is seen from the front. The noses of the two central women appear in profile, while their eyes are frontal, a convention Picasso may have borrowed from Egyptian art (see Figure 1.29). Forbidding rather than seductive, Picasso's female nudes have been stripped of their traditional sensuous appeal. In one disquieting stroke, the artist banished the image of the alluring woman from the domain of Western art.

Les Demoiselles was the precursor of an audacious new style known as *Cubism*, which came to challenge the principles of Renaissance painting as dramatically as Einstein's theory of relativity had challenged Newtonian physics. In the Cubist canvas, the comfortable, recognizable world of the senses disappears beneath a scaffold of semitransparent planes and short, angular lines; ordinary objects are made to look as if they have exploded and been reassembled in bits and pieces (Figure 14.12).

Cubism came to offer a new formal language, one wholly unconcerned with narrative content. Around 1912, Cubist canvases began to include fragments of wallpaper, wine labels, playing cards, and scraps of newspaper. These were pasted onto the surface of the canvas—a technique known as *collage* (from the French *coller*, “to paste”). With his colleague Georges Braque (1882–1963), Picasso produced canvases filled with hidden meanings, puns, and subtle references to contemporary events.

Making Connections

“MAGICAL OBJECTS”

While scholars debate the question of exactly which tribal artworks Picasso might have seen at the Ethnographic Museum in Paris, all concur that copper-clad Kota reliquary guardians and certain ritual masks were among those he admired (compare Figures 14.10 and 14.11). “For me,” Picasso explained, “the masks were not just sculptures; they were magical objects . . . intercessors against unknown, threatening spirits.”

Q What features in the ritual mask might have influenced Picasso's radical move away from realistic representation?

Figure 14.10 Mask from Etoumbi region, Democratic Republic of the Congo. Wood, height 14 in. Musée Barbier-Mueller, Geneva. Photo © akq-images.

Figure 14.11 Pablo Picasso, detail of *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*, 1907.

The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Photo © Scala, Florence. © 2019 Estate of Pablo Picasso/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

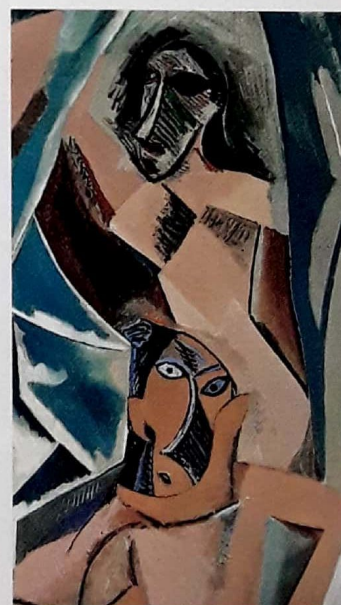




Figure 14.12 Pablo Picasso, *Man with a Violin*, 1911. Oil on canvas, 39 $\frac{1}{8}$ × 29 $\frac{7}{8}$ in. With *Analytic Cubism*, as the style came to be called, a multiplicity of viewpoints replaced one-point perspective. The Cubist image, conceived as if one were moving around, above, and below the subject and even perceiving it from within, appropriated the fourth dimension—time itself.

Philadelphia Museum of Art. Photo © The Philadelphia Museum of Art/Art Resource, NY. © 2019 Estate of Pablo Picasso/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

get—reached Paris, where the horrified Picasso read illustrated newspaper accounts of the attack as the death toll mounted. Earlier in the year, the artist had been invited to contribute a painting for the Spanish Pavilion of the Paris World's Fair. The bombing of Guernica provided him with inspiration for the huge mural that would become the landmark antiwar image of the twentieth century (Figure 14.14). Picasso invests Cubism's strong, angular motifs with expressive fervor. The bull and horse of the Spanish bullfight—Picasso's lifelong metaphor for savage discord—share the shallow stage with a broken statue of a warrior and four women, one of whom holds a dead infant. This figure, her upturned head issuing a voiceless scream, is the physical embodiment of human grief. At the center of the painting, the horse, whose body bears the gaping wound of a spear, rears its head as if to echo the woman's anguished cry. The shattered statue at the bottom of the composition symbolizes war's corrupting effects on the artifacts of high culture.

Cubism brought daring new ideas to sculpture as well. The **assemblage**, a genre invented by Picasso, made use of miscellaneous three-dimensional fragments that were built up or pieced together. Like the collage, the assemblage depended on the imaginative combination of found objects and materials. The new procedure constituted a radical alternative to traditional techniques of carving in stone, metal-casting, and modeling in clay or plaster (Figure 14.13).

A quarter of a century after the birth of Cubism, Picasso was to paint another landmark work—one motivated not by the search for a new language of form, but by political events. On the afternoon of April 26, 1937, in the midst of the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939) that pitted Republican forces against the Fascist dictatorship of General Francisco Franco, the German air force (in league with the Spanish Fascists) dropped incendiary bombs on Guernica, a small Basque market town in northeast Spain. News of the event—the first aerial bombardment of a civilian tar-

Figure 14.13 Pablo Picasso, *Guitar*, 1912–1913. Construction of sheet metal and wire, 30 $\frac{1}{2}$ × 13 $\frac{3}{4}$ × 7 $\frac{5}{8}$ in. Picasso's *Guitar* achieves its powerful effect by means of fragmented planes, deliberate spatial inversions (note the projecting soundhole), and the wedding of commonplace materials.

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Figure 14.14 Pablo Picasso, *Guernica*, 1937. Oil on canvas, 11 ft. 5½ in. × 25 ft. 5¾ in. *Guernica* captures the grim brutality and suffering of the wartime era. Picasso used monochromatic tones—the ashen grays of incineration—which also call to mind newspapers, photographs, and film, the documentary media of mass communication by which Picasso learned of the event. Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid. Photo © John Bigelow Taylor/Art Resource, NY. © 2019 Estate of Pablo Picasso/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

Futurism

Technology and art, linked by the Modernist mandate to “make it new,” sparked the movement known as *Futurism*. The Italian poet and iconoclast Filippo Tommaso Marinetti (1876–1944) issued a series of manifestoes that attacked all forms of academic culture and linked contemporary artistic expression to industry, technology, and urban life. Marinetti demanded an art of “burning violence” that would free Italy from its “fetid gangrene of professors, archaeologists, antiquarians, and rhetoricians.” “We declare,” he wrote in his *Futurist Manifesto* of 1909, “that there can be no modern painting except from the starting point of an absolutely modern sensation. . . . A roaring motorcar is more beautiful than the winged *Victory of Samothrace*.” The Futurists glorified the technology that had altered modern life by way of the automobile, the machine gun, and Rome’s newly installed electric street lamps. Their landmark alternative to static academicism was produced by Umberto Boccioni (1882–1916). His near life-sized bronze sculpture captures the sensation of motion as it pushes forward like an automated robot (Figure 14.15).



The radical voice of Futurism was heard beyond Italy, where it came to influence the early career of the French artist Marcel Duchamp (1887–1968). When Duchamp’s *Futuristic Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2* (see Figure 14.16) was exhibited at the International Exhibition of Modern Art (known as the Armory Show) in New York City, one critic mockingly called it “an explosion in a shingle factory.” Yet, from the time of its first showing in 1913, the painting (and much of the art in the Armory exhibition) had a formative influence on the rise of American Modernism. Futurism did not last beyond the end of World War I, but its impact was felt in both the United States and Russia, where Futurist efforts to capture the sense of form in motion would coincide with the first developments in the technology of cinematography.

Figure 14.15 Umberto Boccioni, *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space*, 1913. Bronze (cast 1931), 43⅞ × 34⅞ × 15¾ in. The striding figure, which consists of an aggressive series of dynamic, jagged lines, is clearly human in form, despite Boccioni’s assertion that artists should “abolish . . . the traditionally exalted place of subject matter.” The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by Scala/Art Resource, NY.

Matisse and Fauvism

While Cubists and Futurists were principally concerned with matters of space and motion, other Modernists, led by the French artist Henri Matisse (1869–1954), made *color* the principal feature of their canvases. This group, disparagingly called “Fauves” (“wild beasts”) by a critic who saw their work at the 1905 Salon d’Automne in Paris, employed flat, bright colors in an arbitrary manner reminiscent of van Gogh and Gauguin (see Figures 13.23 and 13.24). But whereas the latter had used color to

evoke a mood or symbolic idea, the Fauves were concerned with color as it served pictorial structure. Critics who called these artists “wild beasts” were in fact responding to the crude and savage application of paint, the spontaneous and instinctive use of pigment that they dismissed as “color madness.” Matisse scorned the critics, maintaining that colors and shapes were the equivalent of feelings (Figure 14.17). “Exactitude is not truth,” he insisted. Influenced by Islamic art and Russian icons, Matisse moved in the direction of decorative simplicity; his mastery of line and color made him one of the twentieth century’s most beloved painters.

Making Connections

THE BIRTH OF MOTION PICTURES AND THE VISUAL ARTS

As an artform that captures rapidly changing experience, cinema is *the* quintessentially modern medium. The earliest public film presentations took place in the mid-1890s. In 1895, Thomas Edison (1847–1931) was the first American to project moving images onto a screen publicly, while in France the brothers Auguste and Louis Lumière (1862–1954; 1864–1948) perfected the process by which cellulose film ran smoothly in a commercial projector. These first experiments delighted audiences with moving pictures of everyday reality.

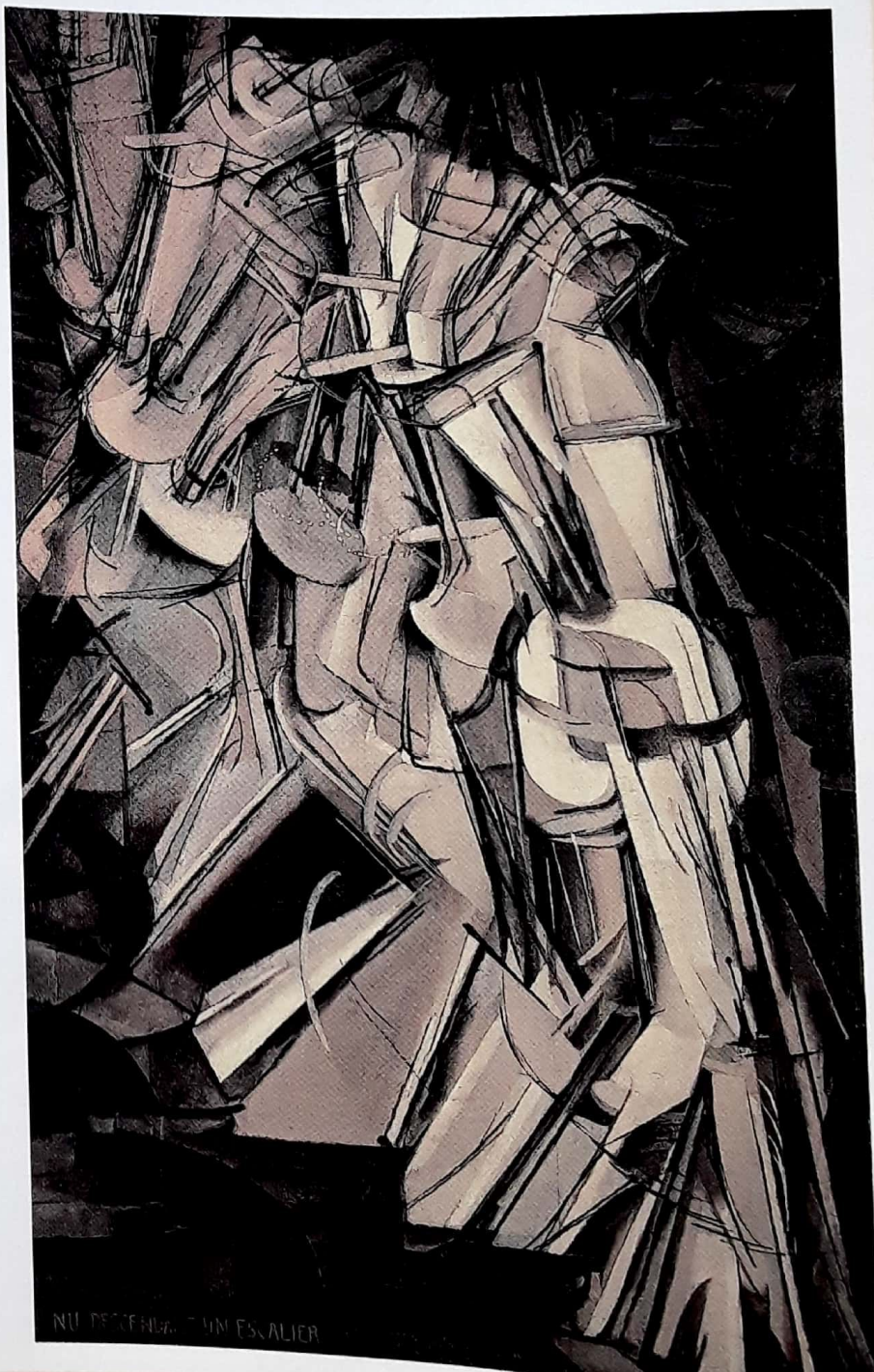
It was not until 1902, however, that film was used to create a reality all its own: In that year, the French filmmaker Georges Méliès (1861–1938) completed a theatrical sequence called *A Trip to the Moon*, a fantastic reconstruction of reality based on a novel by Jules Verne. One year later, the American director Edwin S. Porter (1869–1941) produced the twelve-minute silent film *The Great Train Robbery* (1903), which treated the myth of American frontier life in the story of a sensational holdup followed by the pursuit and capture of the bandits. These pioneer narrative films established the idiom for two of the most popular genres in cinematic history: the science-fiction film and the “western.”

Marcel Duchamp was familiar with the pioneer efforts in the new industry of motion pictures, in which “multiple profiles” gave the appearance of movement (Figure 14.16). He was also fascinated by the “magic” of the X-ray, a technique devised in the late nineteenth century but not widely used until 1910.

Q Have motion pictures in our own time had a similar impact on contemporary art?

Figure 14.16 Marcel Duchamp, *Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2*, 1912. Oil on canvas, 58 × 35 in.

Philadelphia Museum of Art. Photo © The Philadelphia Museum of Art/Art Resource, NY. © Association Marcel Duchamp/ADAGP, Paris/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York 2019.



(Figure 14.22). Calder's mobiles (ranging from a few feet in size to enormous proportions) float freely in mid-air, taking advantage of the chance effects of air currents to create changing visual relationships between abstract solids and the spaces they occupy.

Expressionism

"Illness, madness, and death were the black angels that kept watch over my cradle," wrote the first Expressionist artist of the twentieth century, Edvard Munch (1863–1944). A contemporary of Freud, this Norwegian painter was obsessed with the traumas of puberty and sexuality, and deeply troubled by personal associations with death—tuberculosis had killed both his mother and his sister. Such subjects provided the imagery for his paintings and woodcuts; but it was actually in his style—a haunting amalgam of violently distorted forms and savage colors—that Munch captured the anguished intensity of the neurosis that

Figure 14.21 Constantin Brancusi, *Bird in Space*, 1928. Polished bronze, height 4 ft. 6 in. The elegant form, curved like a feather, unites birdlike qualities of grace and poise with the dynamic sense of soaring levitation characteristic of mechanical flying machines, such as rockets and airplanes. Indeed, when Brancusi's bronze *Bird* first arrived in America, United States customs officials mistook it for a piece of industrial machinery.

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Figure 14.22 Alexander Calder, *Lobster Trap and Fish Tail*, 1939. Hanging mobile: painted steel wire and sheet aluminum, approx. 8 ft. 6 in. × 9 ft. 6 in. It was Duchamp who gave the name "mobile" to the hanging artworks Calder produced from colored shapes. While these objects evoke a sense of spontaneity, they were assembled with careful deliberateness.

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caused his mental collapse in 1908. *The Scream* (Figure 14.23), a landmark painting that has become a universal symbol of the modern condition, takes its mood of urgency and alarm from the combined effects of sinuous clouds, writhing blue-black waters, and a dramatically receding pier (a popular meeting spot near Munch's summer cottage). These visual rhythms suggest the resonating sound of the voiceless cry described by Munch in the notes to a preliminary drawing for the painting: "I walked with two friends. Then the sun sank. Suddenly the sky turned red as



Figure 14.23 Edvard Munch, *The Scream*, 1893. Oil, pastel, and casein on cardboard, 35¾ × 29 in. The ghostly foreground figure—Munch himself—may have been inspired by an Inca mummy the artist had seen in the Paris World's Fair of 1889. The blood-red sky may have been inspired by a volcanic eruption that took place in Indonesia in August 1883, the effects of which reached Munch's hometown in Norway.

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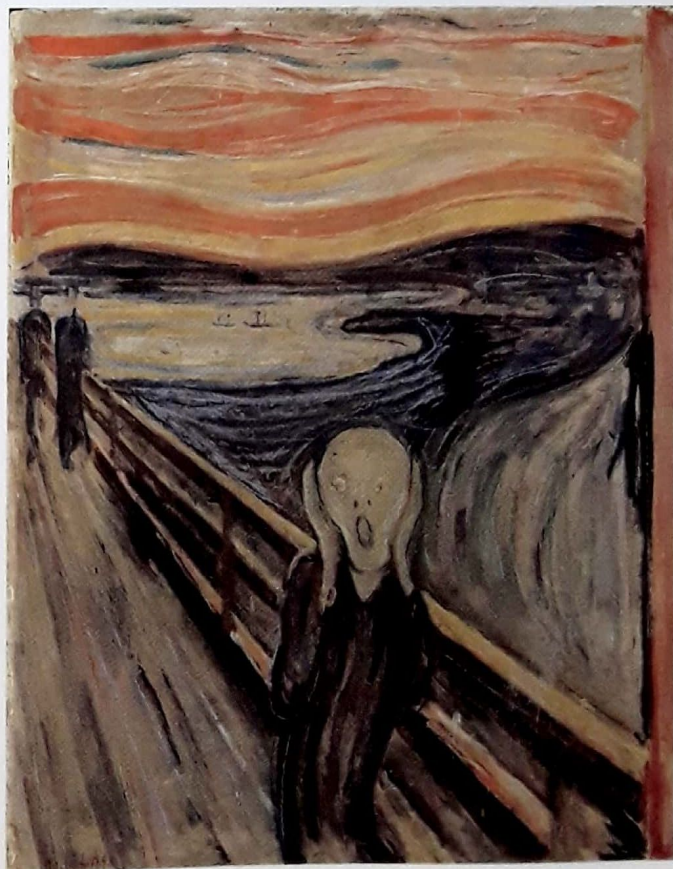




Figure 14.24 Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, *Street, Berlin*, 1913. Oil on canvas, 47½ × 35½ in. Kirchner's angular forms reveal the influence of African sculpture, while the nervous intensity of his line style reflects his debt to the German graphic tradition.
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blood. . . My friends walked on, and I was left alone, trembling with fear. I felt as if all nature were filled with one mighty unending shriek."

Munch's impassioned paintings foreshadowed German Expressionism, a style that gave violent external form to intense internal feeling. The first of a number of Expressionist groups, *Die Brücke* ("The Bridge") emerged in Dresden in 1905. Its members believed their inspired paintings would constitute a bridge to the future. Influenced by Freud and by the arts of Africa and Oceania, *Die Brücke* artists Ernst Ludwig Kirchner (1880–1938) and Emil Nolde (1867–1956) used harsh colors, angular forms, and the bold application of black to create canvases (and woodcuts) filled with pathos and despair. Seized by Germany's prewar tensions, Kirchner painted ominous cityscapes that show urban life as crowded, impersonal, and threatening (Figure 14.24).

Metaphysical Art and Fantasy

While the German Expressionists brought subjective intensity to the depiction of the visible world, other artists explored the life that lay beyond the senses. Born in Greece, Giorgio de

Chirico (1888–1978) moved to Italy in 1909. Rejecting the tenets of Italian Futurism (see page 401), he pioneered a style he called "metaphysical"—that is, "beyond physical reality." Using sharply delineated images, contradictory perspective, unnatural colors, and illogically cast shadows, de Chirico produced disturbing, dreamlike effects similar to those achieved by Kafka's prose. In his painting *The Nostalgia of the Infinite* (Figure 14.25), two figures, dwarfed by eerie shadows, stand in an empty courtyard; five flags flutter mysteriously in an airless, acid-green sky. The vanishing point established by the orthogonal lines of the portico on the right contradicts the low placement of the distant horizon.

Folk tales and the residue of intimate dreams and memories inspired other fantasists. Marc Chagall (1887–1985) drew on childhood recollections of his native Russia for paintings filled with imaginative whimsy. The disjunctive sizes and unexpected positions of Chagall's images, and their arbitrary colors, defy the laws of physical reality (Figure 14.26). Autobiographical motifs,



Figure 14.25 Giorgio de Chirico, *The Nostalgia of the Infinite*, 1914, date on painting 1911. Oil on canvas, 53¼ × 25½ in. About his disquieting cityscapes, de Chirico explained: "There are more enigmas in the shadow of a man who walks in the sun than in all the religions of past, present, and future."
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