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Mandy El-Sayegh in her studio - photograph by Abtin Eshraghi, courtesy the artist

Mandy El-Sayegh - Why I Make Collage

'The cuts have already been made by life. I, as an agent of reassembly, am just selecting those cut things,' says the London-based artist featured in [Vitamin C+](#)

Often working on the floor of her London studio, Mandy El-Sayegh's collages feature newsprint, advertisements, aerial maps, anatomy books and her father's calligraphy, alongside hand-painted elements and non-traditional materials such as latex. Motifs are often repeated across multiple works, demonstrating how the signification of information might change when placed in new contexts.

The notion of corporeality is crucial in El-Sayegh's work - she refers to her collage process as 'suturing' and her painted surfaces as 'skins'. In her site-specific installations, newsprint and silkscreened texts are plastered onto the walls and floor with layers of latex that suggest medical associations or tattooed skin.

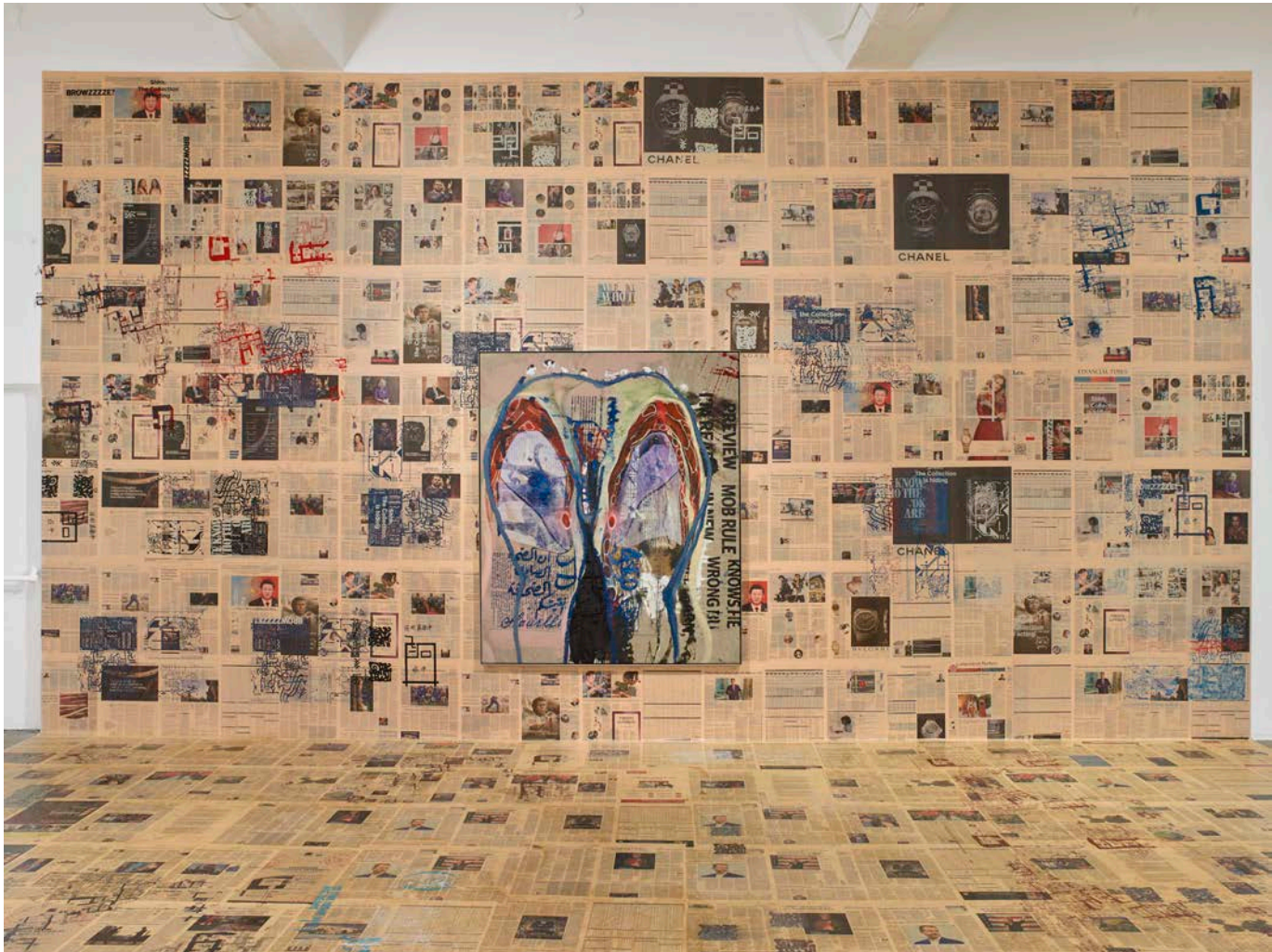
Selangor, Malaysia-born, London-based El-Sayegh is one of 108 artists featured in [Vitamin C+ Collage in Contemporary Art](#) which showcases living artists who employ collage as a central part of their visual-art practice, as selected by 69 leading experts, including museum directors, curators, critics, and collectors. It features an engaging and informative introduction by Yuval Etgar, an internationally renowned expert in the area.

"El-Sayegh's fragments have a Dadaist sensibility and engender difficult questions about society and politics, as well as the role of the artist and the purpose of art," writes Habda Rashid in [Vitamin C+ Collage in Contemporary Art](#). "El-Sayegh creates intricate palimpsests that pulsate with societal information, art history and corporeal processes to upend meaning and allow the beholder space to create their own," Rashid adds.

Born in Selangor, Malaysia, El-Sayegh lives and works in London, where she received a BA in fine art from the University of Westminster in 2007, followed by an MA in painting from the Royal College of Art in 2009.

Her first solo institutional show, the specially commissioned installation *Cite Your Sources*, was held at London's Chisenhale Gallery in 2019. Her work has also been shown in exhibitions at UTA Artist Space, Los Angeles, USA (2022); Busan Biennale, Busan, South Korea (2020); SculptureCenter, Long Island City, USA (2019); Instituto de Visión, Bogotá, Colombia (2018); Sifang Art Museum, Nanjing, China (2017); and the New York Art Book Fair at MoMA PS1, Queens, USA (2016), among others.

In 2022, her work was featured in the British Art Show, the largest touring exhibition of contemporary art in the UK, followed by her participation in the Biennale Matter of Art, Prague. Two works by the artist were acquired by the Tate for their permanent collection in 2022. We asked her a few questions about the collage aspect of her multi-disciplinary practice.



Mandy El-Sayegh, Cite Your Sources, Installation view, Chisenhale Gallery, London, 2019. Commissioned and produced by Chisenhale Gallery, London. Photo: Andy Keate. Courtesy the artist and Chisenhale Gallery.

What draws you to collage, what are the properties that intrigue you? I am drawn to collage (which in my work as I take in the broad sense of the term, including collage, bricolage, layering, suturing) and I think it's important because it is defined by its treatment towards material – a type of methodology – rather than being limited to any specific medium. It can apply to painting, installation, video, performance, sound (maybe not drawing for me), to an outfit and, philosophically, thinking of the processes involved in the formation of the subject and identity, the body in constant states of being made and unmade. So, it's reparatory as well, and urgent. A type of being in the world, and the ability to reassemble is a necessity, I would say.

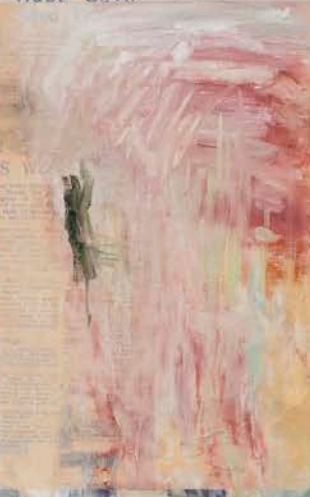


Work on the artist's studio floor - photo courtesy the artist

How improvisatory a medium is collage, do you have a sense of what will happen before you start? It is both improvisatory and there is a limit, I believe, to the treatment of the fragments, once they have been selected. It allows for chance meeting of other surfaces, for example I let studio debris build up in my periphery in order to come to it in an intuitive way. Once that comes together and the materials start speaking to each other, I have to go with the logic of the materials chosen, you can't fight the inherent qualities once you are putting them into play. This can include chemical interactions, for example you can't mix oil with acrylic, and self-imposed restrictions, because there is a potentially endless number of combinations, so you have to limit the infinity. I have self-imposed rules for a canvas, limits to which area the fragments I have chosen can operate in.



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Fig. 125 Hanging

Fig. 126 Hitler's road army



Fig. 125 Keeping order



Fig. 126 Hitler's road army



Fig. 127 Hitler's road army



Fig. 127 Hitler's road army

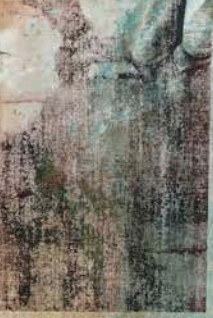


Fig. 127 Hitler's road army

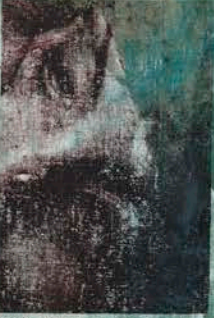


Fig. 128 Hitler's road army



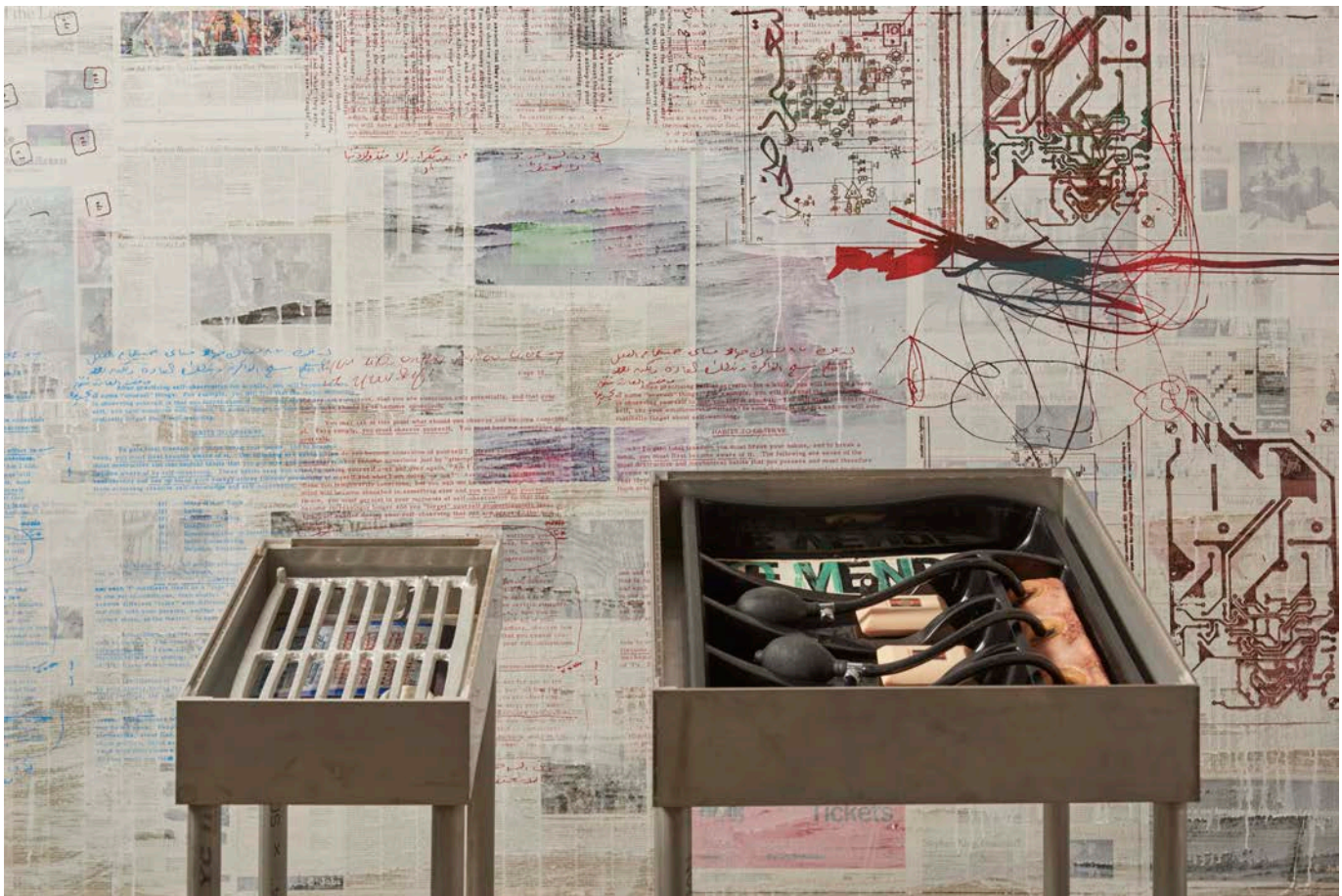
Fig. 125 Hanging



Fig. 125 Hanging

Mandy El-Sayegh, The Face, 2021, Silkscreened oil and acrylic on linen with collaged elements, 218 x 144 cm. 85 7/8 x 56 3/4 in. Photo: Charles Duprat. Courtesy the artist and Thaddaeus Ropac, London, Paris, Salzburg, Seoul.

Collage is often something that most people encounter in childhood, can you remember your first attempt? I don't have any one particular memory. I think a thing that most people can relate to is having a corner space – I had one in my bedroom for tacking sticking, shelving, collecting things that I liked, or thought I liked, from early childhood to late teens, and the objects could be substituted. A collage of a provisional self, and also a way of marking territory when there is not much space. I would cut out things from posters, objects, trinkets, stickers, tickets saved from any important encounter. I like this – the space that can hold all these bits that are always switching out. It is primitive and experimental, but also a necessary reminder of who you are, who you think you are, what you want to remind yourself of when things are precarious. People in prison have those little corners in their cells, or if you are away from family for some reason – those spaces, whether it is by a desk or a bed, are a type of holding space.



Mandy El-Sayegh, Searching the Sky for Rain, Installation view, SculptureCenter, New York, 2019. Photo: Kyle Knodell. Image courtesy the artist and SculptureCenter.

How do you start? Is the first cut the deepest? I don't see it in those terms, as the first cuts made, because I apprehend the fragments that are found and collected, so they are already cut and

decontextualised. The cuts have already been made by life and I, as an agent of reassembly, am just selecting those cut things intuitively and clustering them, letting things talk to each other, letting compositions form through relations of these piles of hoarded stuff. I get more and more discerning depending on the project, the palette, what is there. It is a continuous process of relation of all these parts.



Mandy El-Sayegh, Mole Cricket 19, 2019, Stainless steel vitrine table, polymer clay, pigment, cutlery organiser, rubber pumps, soap, steel 'for sale' sign, glass. Table top: 79 x 41 x 40 cm. 2.8 x 16.1 x 15.7 in. Photo: Kyle Knodell. Image courtesy the artist and SculptureCenter.

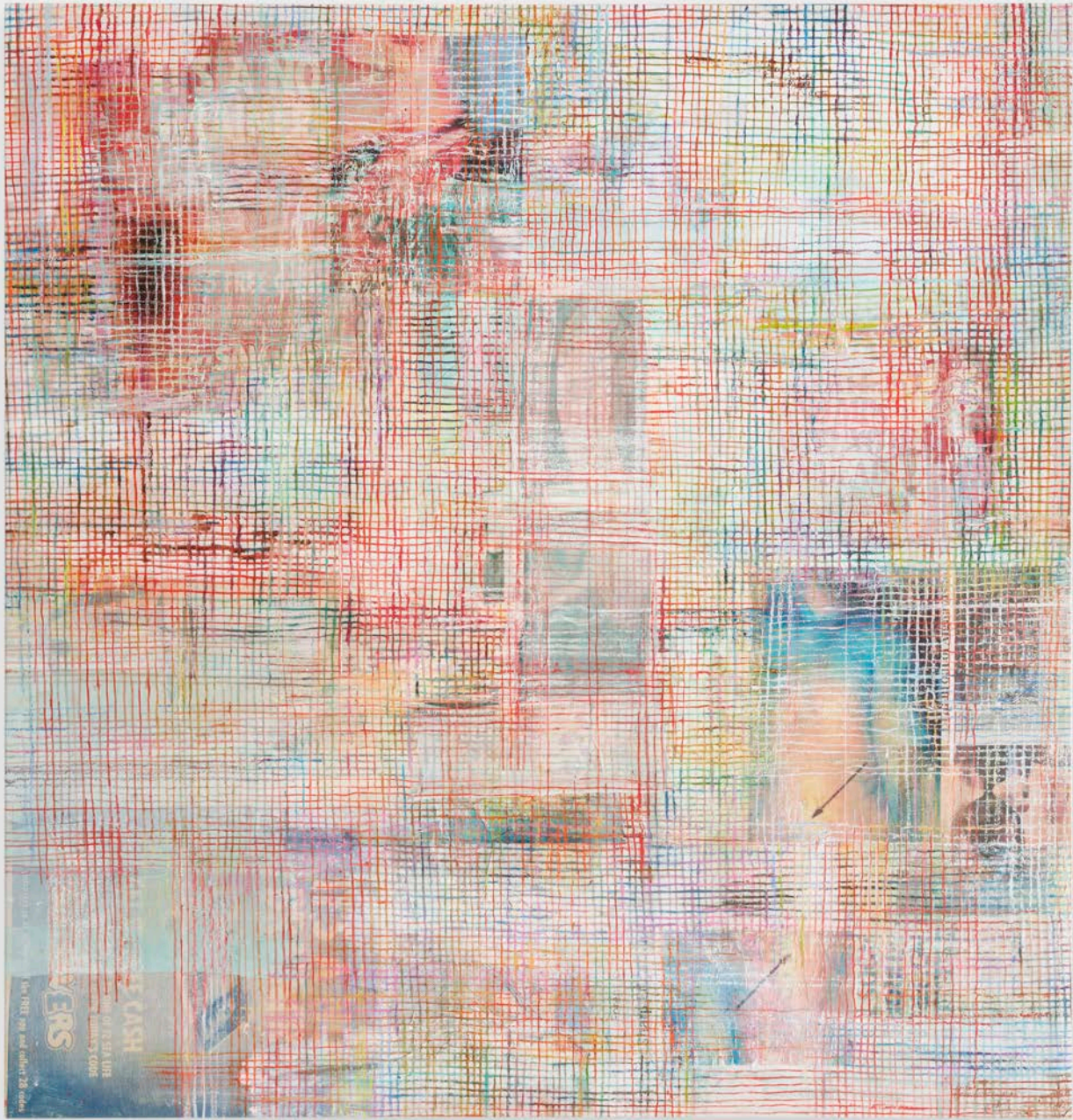
What do most people miss when they attempt to 'assess' collage? I am not an authority on the right way of looking at collage, but the way in which I look at it is a broad treatment, which includes

the act of superimposing things, montage, bricolage – which I mentioned before. So, it is not limited to cut-up bits of paper and pritt stick, but a type of treatment of fragments to form re-assemblages, new bodies from a former loss of context.



Mandy El-Sayegh, Protective Inscriptions, Installation View, Lehmann Maupin, Seoul, 2021. Photo: OnArt Studio. Courtesy the artist and Lehmann Maupin, New York, Hong Kong, Seoul, London.

What are the hardest things for you to get 'right'? The challenge is to make the piece, the whole, greater than the specificity and sum of its collected parts. So that each fragment is not stealing attention too much from the others, that they come together in a new language that is harmonious.



Mandy El-Sayegh, Net-Grid (Lucky Fiver), 2021. Oil and mixed media on linen with silkscreened collaged elements. 235 x 225 cm. 92 1/2 x 88 5/8 in. Photo: Charles Duprat. Courtesy the artist and Thaddaeus Ropac, London, Paris, Salzburg, and Seoul.

Is it wrong to think of collage as something ephemeral, or less durable? It can be seen as those things, and it can also be durable. It can be made in resin, for example, and that's pretty durable, materially speaking. But for me the attraction is to lay bare the precarity the idea of wholeness, whether that is in a composition, or a self. So, to see the fragments there as things that belonged to a different context at one time, in a new context, shows that, transparently.



Mandy El-Sayegh, *Daily (oval)*, 2019, Inkjet, acrylic, pastel, and ink on canvas. 160 x 110 cm. 63 x 43 1/4 in. Photo: Matthew Hollow. Courtesy the artist and Lehmann Maupin, New York, Hong Kong, Seoul, London.

What's more important, paper or glue? If I were to apply it to the body, it would be: what is more important, individual organs or the fascia that holds it together? And we need both to function.

What's next for you and what do you think is next for collage? I can say what is next in my practice – I would like to develop these types of assemblages into increasingly complex worlds. So, assemblages or collages within collages; works within installations within films within performances. A type of re-worlding of these fragments in different constellations that can expand beyond the picture plane.

You can see more of El-Sayegh's work at a forthcoming solo show at [Thaddaeus Ropac](#), London, 1st-30th September 2023, and in a two-person exhibition with Kader Attia at [Lehmann Maupin](#), London, 21st September-4th November, 2023.

Meanwhile, [Vitamin C+ Collage in Contemporary Art](#), featuring over 100 artists including: Njideka Akunyili Crosby; Ellen Gallagher; Peter Kennard; Linder, Christian Marclay; Wangechi Mutu; Deborah Roberts; Martha Rosler; and Mickalene Thomas is available now in the store. We'll be running more interviews with artists featured in the book in the coming weeks.

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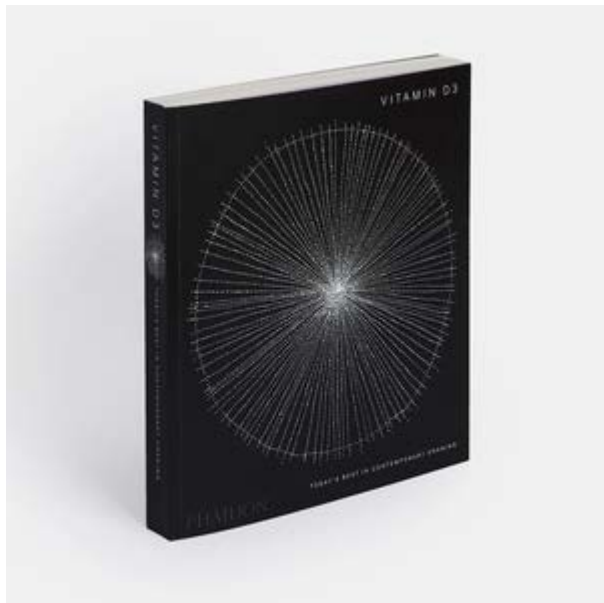
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