KAZIMIR MALEVICH
AND THE RUSSIAN AVANT-GARDE
Featuring Selections from the Khardzhiev and Costakis Collections
8 March – 22 June 2014

Media Conference: 7 March 2014, 11 a.m.

Content

1. Exhibition Dates  Page 2
2. Information on the Exhibition  Page 4
3. Wall Quotations  Page 6
4. Catalogue  Page 13
5. Current and Upcoming Exhibitions  Page 14

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### Exhibition Dates

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>8 March – 22 June 2014</th>
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<tr>
<td>Director</td>
<td>Rein Wolfs</td>
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<td>Managing Director</td>
<td>Dr. Bernhard Spies</td>
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<tr>
<td>Exhibition Manager and Curator</td>
<td>Dr. Agnieszka Lulinska</td>
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<td>Head of Corporate Communications/Press Officer</td>
<td>Sven Bergmann</td>
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<td>Catalogue / Press Copy</td>
<td>€ 32 / € 15</td>
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| Opening Hours  | Tuesday and Wednesday: 10 a.m. to 9 p.m.  
                | Thursday to Sunday: 10 a.m. to 7 p.m.  
                | Public Holidays: 10 a.m. to 7 p.m.  
                | Closed on Mondays |
| Admission      | standard / reduced / family ticket: € 10 / € 6.50 / € 16  
                | Happy Hour-Ticket: € 6  
                | Tuesday and Wednesday: 7 to 9 p.m.  
                | Thursday to Sunday: 5 to 7 p.m.  
                | (for individuals only) |
| Advance Ticket Sales | standard / reduced / family ticket: € 11.90 / € 7.90 / € 19.90  
                | inclusive public transport ticket (VRS)  
                | on www.bonnticket.de  
                | ticket hotline: T +49 228 502010 |
| Admission for all exhibitions | standard / reduced / family ticket: € 15 / € 10 / € 24 |
| Audio Guide for adults | € 4 / reduced € 3  
                | in German language only |
| Guided Tours in different languages | English, Dutch, French and other languages on request |
| Guided Group Tours information and registration | T +49 228 9171–243  
                | F +49 228 9171–244  
                | kunstvermittlung@bundeskunsthalle.de |
Public Transport
Underground lines 16, 63, 66 and bus lines 610, 611 and 630 to Heussallee / Museumsmeile.

Parking
There is a car and coach park on Emil-Nolde-Straße behind the Art and Exhibition Hall.
Navigation: Emil-Nolde-Straße 11, 53113 Bonn

Press Information (German / English)
www.bundeskunsthalle.de
For press files follow ‘press’.

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Cultural Partner
WDR3
Information on the Exhibition

As a revolutionary thinker and radical reformer of the arts, Kasimir Malevich (1879–1935) is seen to be one of the most formative personalities of the early 20th century. In the west the artist, theorist, and teacher is primarily known for his abstract art. Instead of attempting to represent visible reality, his Suprematism aims at conveying and depicting an immaterial world. But above all, Malevich's oeuvre must be viewed with regard to the contrasting sphere that evolves between abstraction and figuration. In the course of his career, the artist covered an impressive range of Modernist styles and forms of expression. To different degrees, Impressionism, Symbolism, Fauvism, Cubism, and Futurism had a distinct impact on his artistic approach and its visual implementation.

The exhibition Kasimir Malevich and the Russian Avant-garde presents the whole scope of the work of this Russian Avant-garde artist. Over 300 paintings, graphic works, and sculptures, but also designs for costumes and excerpts from his revolutionary opera “Victory over the Sun” provide insights into the impressive range of his oeuvre that continues to pose a both artistic and intellectual challenge. Although Malevich's work can be described as a complex mental exercise that oscillates between abstraction and figuration, it is not a chronology that reaches its intellectual peak in the formal negation of the depicted subject. However, a reduction to this formula would not do Suprematism justice, as Painterly Realism of a Peasant Woman in Two Dimensions implies, the title of the famous red square from 1915 which is a key work in the exhibition. Kasimir Malevich's artistic approach is defined by the universal concept of humanity and the declared intention to create a new world with artistic means. Ultimately, Suprematism enabled him to visualise matters of the mind with the means of art.

Kasimir Malevich's work is characterised by expansive stylistic heterogeneity. In this context, it is significant that changes in forms of expression are only to some extent chronological which makes it difficult to divide his oeuvre into artistic “phases”. The coexistence of styles directs the focus onto the conveyed contents and the theoretical framework of his art. Seen in the historical context of his time, Malevich was definitely a revolutionary artist and thinker. His representations of farmers, for instance, are a recurring feature that cannot be appreciated without taking the political events in Russia and the nascent Soviet Union into consideration. This connection is especially relevant with regard to Malevich's figurative late work and his return to a figurative pictorial language – after all, he did not make this transition in favour of the representational form of expression applied in Socialist Realism. Instead his late work is largely defined by a use of forms that seems to combine Suprematism with figurative motifs. The main objective was clearly not a mere reproduction of visual reality. In point of fact, Suprematism evolved thus integrating representational forms and, above all, their symbolic meaning into the pictorial concept.

This also explains Malevich's many allusions to traditional Old Russian icon painting. His Suprematist compositions with their utter concentration on the
arrangement of geometric shapes show distinct references to the pictorial structure of religious icons. Classic elements such as the nimbus or the cross, but also the use of certain symbolic colours show the Avant-garde artist’s close connection with Russian tradition. Moreover, these motifs are proof that this is the work of an artistic thinker. His extensive influence – both as a theorist and an artist – is also conveyed in the works of important contemporaries. The show juxtaposes Kasimir Malevich’s art with contemporaries such as El Lissitzky, Mikhail Larionov, Vladimir Tatlin, Ilya Chashnik, Gustav Klutsis, Mikhail Matyushin, and Olga Rosanova.

Many international lenders have contributed to the exhibition, among them are the State Russian Museum in St. Petersburg, the State Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow, the Centre Pompidou in Paris, the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the Moderna Museet in Stockholm, the State Museum of Contemporary Art-Costakis Collection in Thessaloniki, and also the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam and the Chardschijew Foundation in Amsterdam. For the first time, extensive groups of works from the Nikolaj Chardschijew and the George Costakis Collections have been united in an exhibition. Both were pioneering collectors of art of the Russian Avant-garde and created impressive collections during a time when abstract art was forbidden in the Soviet Union.

Furthermore, several works by Malevich and three Old Russian icons from the State Russian Museum in St. Petersburg that represent highly interesting reference points with regard to Suprematism could be obtained especially for the exhibition in Bonn.

Rein Wolfs, director of the Art and Exhibition Hall of the Federal Republic of Germany, explains the significance of this exhibition as follows: “In this retrospective exhibition, the special focus on his late work takes Malevich’s radical development towards Suprematism a step further. The outstanding loans from St. Petersburg are proof that non-figurative pictorial elements also play an important role in the artist’s figurative late work. Even in retrospect, these insights modify the notion of a purely abstract Suprematist period. The three Old Russian icons in the show underline Malevich’s intermediate position in the contrasting realm between realism and abstraction”.

Organised by Art and Exhibition Hall of the Federal Republic of Germany in collaboration with the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam and Tate Modern, London
1904–1907
**Impressionist Beginnings**
At the beginning of the twentieth century Moscow vied with Paris as the home of modern French art. This was due to the passion and connoisseurship of wealthy Moscow businessmen, chief among them Sergei Shchukin and Ivan Morozov. More than publications and exhibitions, it was Shchukin’s collection, open to the public from 1907, that acquainted Russian art-lovers with outstanding works by Western artists such as Monet, Renoir, Cézanne, Gauguin, Matisse and Picasso.

Among the young painters who came to see the collection of French Impressionists and felt encouraged to pursue his own experiments was Kazimir Malevich. Claude Monet’s *Rouen Cathedral at Midday* (1893) was a revelation and an incentive: ‘I understood that the real essence of Impressionism did not lie in painting nature or objects as realistically as possible, but in capturing the light-filled reflections of the blue sky, the pure transparent tones and textures. […] We have to focus on the pictorial.’ It was not the superficial motif but the artistic vision that defined the essence of painting – an approach that Malevich also recognised in the work of Paul Cézanne.

1905–1910
**The Rise of Modernism**
Kazimir Malevich’s early work mirrors the rapid evolution of Russian art after the turn of the century. The art scene of Moscow and Saint Petersburg was abuzz with a huge variety of different styles and sources of inspiration. Art Nouveau and Symbolism were celebrated as the aesthetic and philosophical foundation of Russian Modernism.

The aspirations of the Symbolists – the rejection of the conventions of Naturalism, the quest for purity of expression and the primacy of the artist’s subjectivity and spirituality – left their mark on the worldview of the next generation of young artists. Malevich’s gouaches of religious and mythological subjects date from this period.

The spring of 1908 saw the opening of the spectacular *Golden Fleece* exhibition which was one of the first shows to present contemporary Russian and French art side by side. The impact of Cézanne’s geometrised nature studies, van Gogh’s expressive works, Gauguin’s primitivism and the brilliant colour compositions of the Fauves drove Malevich to a radical change of style. And while young avant-garde artists were causing a clamorous stir, interest in the spiritual foundations of Orthodox Christianity and traditional icon painting enjoyed an undreamt renaissance.
1911–1913

Neo-Primitivism and Cubo-Futurism

In 1910/11 two spectacular exhibitions of young Russian art were held in Moscow. The members of the artists’ groups Jack of Diamonds and Donkey’s Tail – among them Kazimir Malevich – confidently responded to the primitivist tendencies in contemporary Western art by juxtaposing them with their own Eastern traditions. ‘Our art has its starting point in the lubok [popular illustrated print], the primitive, the icon, because in them we find the pithiest, the most immediate and, what’s more, the most purely pictorial perception of life.’

Malevich’s figural compositions that capture everyday provincial life and the simple life of the Russian peasantry date from this period. These paintings offer more than a passing nod to Gauguin and Cézanne, but they are also informed by Malevich’s familiarity with Ukrainian and Russian folk art. Narrative is dismissed in favour of increasingly autonomous form and colour; correct anatomy and central perspective are abandoned.

By moving further and further away from visible reality Malevich focused on the purely pictorial character of his paintings. Around 1912 he embraced and developed Cubo-Futurism, a new formal language characterised by geometrising, dynamic forms and bold colours that invested his paintings with an autonomous pictorial reality.

1913

Victory over the Sun

The year 1913 is widely regarded as the key year of Russian Modernism. The young avant-garde turned its back on the ageing generation of Symbolists. Describing themselves as ‘Futurists’ or ‘Futurians’ and advancing their theses with aggressive glee and satirical vigour, the artists and poets set out to conquer the world and to liberate it from the heavy burden of the past.

In July 1913 the ‘First Pan-Russian Congress of the Bards of the Future’ – consisting of Michael Matyushin, Aleksei Kruchenykh and Kazimir Malevich – issued a manifesto which called for the destruction of the Russian language and traditional patterns of thought. The artists firmly believed in a subconscious knowledge beyond the reach of rational common sense. To describe this transrational beyondsense they coined the word zaum (za: beyond; um: the mind) and developed an experimental onomatopoeic zaum language to go with it.

In December 1913 they premiered their collaborative Futurist opera Victory over the Sun in Saint Petersburg. Malevich designed the set and the costumes. With their fragments of objects and floating geometric planes, some of his designs seem like harbingers of his later Suprematist pictures. Malevich himself wrote in 1915: “What was created unconsciously then now bears astonishing fruit.”
1913–1914
Cubo-Futurism and Alogism
By 1910 at the latest, Malevich was experimenting with several styles at once. Like many Russian painters of the period he avidly absorbed Western as well as traditional Russian ideas and principles and incorporated them into his own work.

Particularly fruitful was his engagement with Russian Cubo-Futurism. Here Malevich combined the plastic elements and lessons of French Cubism (the creation of pictorial space through the fragmentation of the objects depicted and the geometrisation of the figurative elements) with those of Italian Futurism (the depiction of movement and speed through multiplication).

Declaring that ‘for the artist, reason is a form of imprisonment’, Malevich embraced the concept of ‘Alogism’ which questioned the rational, logical relationship between image and reality. Absurd compositions of clearly recognisable but inscrutably – alogically – combined objects dominate his paintings and drawings of the period.

Shortly thereafter, abstract, floating planes of colour began to appear in Malevich’s paintings, as though his compositions were coming apart at the seams. From there it was but a small step to fully fledged Suprematism, in which the Cubist background made way for a monochrome white ground.

1913–1915
Between Patriotism and Alogism
Elaborately designed artists’ books are among the greatest achievements of the Russian avant-garde. Conceived as programmatically collaborative projects of theorists, poets and artists, they were directed against outdated expectations and habits of perception. The new ‘transrational beyondsense’ of their visual and verbal fireworks severely tested the stalwart champions of ‘common sense’ and hidebound ‘good taste’.

Working alongside artists such as Olga Rozanova and Mikhail Larionov, Kazimir Malevich collaborated on numerous Futurist publications. The artists elevated the sensual qualities of an individual word or image above the logical sense or coherence of the whole. Handwritten, lithographically duplicated illustrated books were set to revitalise and emotionally charge the ‘dead letters’ independent of their meaning.

The lubok (plural lubki) – a simple, colourful broadsheet print with satirical, patriotic, political or critical character – was one of the most popular genres of Russian folk art. During the First World War the tradition of the lubok was revived and given a new edge. In anti-German propaganda sheets avant-garde artists celebrated the heroic fighting spirit and ingenuity of the Russian peasantry with neo-primitivist naivety.
1915–1922

**Suprematism**

Kazimir Malevich’s origination of Suprematism (Latin *supremus* – the highest) was the logical consequence of his earlier artistic experiments. His work on the opera *Victory over the Sun* led him to the discovery of the black square as the fundamental building block of a pure non-objective pictorial language. In his Suprematist Manifesto, published in 1915 on the occasion of the seminal *Last Futurist Exhibition of Paintings: 0.10*, Malevich laid out the theoretical foundations of the new style: ‘Suprematism is the beginning of a new civilisation. Creation exists only where paintings present shapes that take nothing from what has been created in nature.’ Thus Malevich turned away from visible reality in favour of pictorial realism. Arranging geometric coloured planes on a white ground, he created radically new, harmonious compositions that pulsate with the dynamic intensity of space and colour.

The deceptively simple structures of Suprematist paintings seem to float freely in space – any concept of up or down is suspended. The white pictorial space is conceived as the model and analogy of infinite cosmic space. And, indeed, the conquest of the heavens was crucial to Malevich. As early as 1913 he had written to Michael Matyushin that he could see a time ‘when big cities and the studios of contemporary artists would be held up on huge Zeppelins.’

1920–1927

**Spatial Suprematism and Architectons**

In 1919, upon the recommendation of El Lissitzky (1890-1941), Malevich was invited to join the teaching staff of the People’s Art School in Vitebsk which had been founded by Marc Chagall (1887–1985) a year earlier in the wake of the October Revolution. The call could not have come at a better time. With his monochrome ‘White on White’ compositions Malevich had taken two-dimensional Suprematism as far as it could go. He now wanted to focus on art theory and teaching. At the same time, Vitebsk offered him the opportunity to work with the artist, graphic designer and architect El Lissitzky and to expand Suprematism into other areas.

Malevich applied the principles of Suprematism to the three-dimensional world of sculpture. In the winter of 1920 he replaced the plane of a square with a cube which became the basic building block of his *architectons* – his sketches and plaster models of three-dimensional constructions. Although these geometric studies in volume and form rival the best examples of avant-garde architecture, they should not be misunderstood as symbols or representations of real buildings. What mattered to Malevich was their utopian character. He did not see the artist as a shaper of the present but as a creator of the future.
1919–1929

Art in Everyday Life
Kazimir Malevich never conceived of Suprematism as being confined to the visual arts. Instead he saw it as a transcendental, all-encompassing philosophical concept that spearheaded the great modernist project of the reform of all aspects of life. A charismatic teacher, he kindled the enthusiasm of his students in Vitebsk who, in 1920, formed the UNOVIS group (Champions of New Art). Their goal was the transformation of everyday life through art on the basis of Suprematism.

In addition to producing designs for objects of everyday use and propaganda material, UNOVIS left its mark on the urban landscape of Vitebsk. On Communist holidays trams, cafes and façades were decked out with large-scale Suprematist decorations. The sight made an indelible impression on the future film director Sergei Eisenstein when he passed through Vitebsk in 1920. Another witness reported: ‘It was as though I had entered an enchanted city; but everything was possible and wondrous at the time […].’

When the Russian Civil War ended in 1922 with the victory of the Bolsheviks the avant-garde came increasingly under fire. The public authorities doubted the effectiveness of Suprematist ‘abstract’ propaganda on a largely uneducated population. Henceforth art was to serve Communist agitation.

1923–1927

Teaching
In 1923 Kazimir Malevich was appointed director of the Formal Theoretical Department of the Petrograd State Institute of Artistic Culture (GINKhUK). Michael Matyushin was head of the Department for Organic Culture. The institute investigated mechanisms of perception in art and the question why art was subject to constant change and what that change entailed. Among the results was the realisation that the constituent aspects of a painting – colour, texture, form – are determined by the individual perception of the artist.

Petri dishes, test strips, diagrams, graphs – Kazimir Malevich’s analytical charts resemble scientific studies. The artist, who virtually stopped painting between 1919 and 1928, ironically referred to his institute as the ‘Department of the Bacteriology of Art’.

In the spring of 1926 Malevich travelled to Warsaw and Berlin as a representative of the GINKhUK. He wanted to present his most important works and the results of his research to a Western audience. A German series of charts was produced, but Malevich was unhappy with the lack of precision in the way the texts were worded. However, there was not enough time and money to re-edit them “in a format suitable for Germans”.

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1928–1935

Return to Figuration

In the spring of 1927 Kazimir Malevich travelled to Warsaw and later on to Berlin, where he showed seventy of his works at the Great Berlin Art Exhibition. When he was summoned back to Leningrad in June, he left his paintings and manuscripts behind in Berlin. Meanwhile, back in Stalinist Soviet Russia, calls for a return to an art that was realistic, heroic and easy to understand became more insistent. Malevich, who had spent the last ten years as a teacher and theorist, responded to this dramatic political change by returning to painting.

At the heart of Malevich’s work after 1928 is the so-called Second Peasant Cycle. Drawing on his paintings of the 1910s, the artist produced scenes of simple everyday life in the country in the Impressionist and Neo-Primitivist style of his early years. He frequently dated the works to that earlier period too. But those later paintings and drawings are shaped by the pictorial experience of Suprematism. They are distinguished by hieratic rigour and great economy of plastic means. Their strange sense of being unfinished imbues them with an acuity that Malevich sought to heighten. ‘What is most important for our time are non-objective works and semi-images (like my peasants). They have the most incisive effect.’

1928–1935

Supranaturalism

Kazimir Malevich’s late works bear witness to his perception of himself as an artist. It seemed as though the commitment to abstraction would make any return to figuration impossible. But in a letter of 1927 Malevich wrote: ‘Non-objective art is a pure sensation, an empty house without windows and doors, in which life, like a homeless vagabond, wants to spend a night, and you need to make openings to let it in.’

Yet Malevich remained true to his conviction that art should not merely reproduce the visible world. And it is this approach that distinguishes his late paintings, which he referred to as ‘supranaturaliste’, from contemporary Socialist Realism. Malevich’s austere compositions testify to a perception of colour and form that was shaped by Suprematism. Equally evident is their indebtedness to Russian icon painting.

Peasants are a motif that recurs throughout Malevich’s oeuvre. After 1928 the artist returned to the subject matter of his early works, but the faceless figures set against a schematic landscape can also be read as an affirmation of his commitment to Russia’s traditional peasant culture and a protest against its destruction at the hands of the Soviet regime. His portraits of the period, signed with a black square, pay homage to the clarity of Renaissance portraiture.
1933–1935
Epilogue
‘I don’t paint portraits; I have returned to pictorial culture on the human face’, Anna Leporskaja recorded the words of her teacher Kazimir Malevich in 1931. In his final years the artist re-engaged with figurative art. Pursuing different artistic strategies, he found new formulations for the classic genres of portrait and landscape.

The portraits of a young female labourer, of his wife Natalia and of his friend Ivan Punin (all in Room 12) contain coded messages. Malevich cast his sitters in the mould of the Renaissance, celebrated as the first great age of realistic portraiture and as the very antithesis of icon painting. The renewal of the arts that had been the goal of the Renaissance is likened to the revolutionary approach of Malevich’s pictorial realism. The Suprematist colours black, white, red and yellow dominate the colour scheme of the portraits. The pictures are signed with a black square, ‘the germ of all possibilities’.

Malevich’s final portraits strike a different note. Terminally ill with cancer and increasingly isolated as an artist, he painted small portraits of the people who were close to him, capturing them in intimate snapshot-like images that eschew all posturing or statement-making.
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Current and Upcoming Exhibitions

**AN ORIENTAL ADVENTURE**
Max von Oppenheim and his Discovery of Tell Halaf
30 April to 10 August 2014
In 1899 the diplomat and archaeological explorer Baron Max von Oppenheim (1860–1946), a scion of the Cologne banking family, discovered the residence of an Aramaean ruler at Tell Halaf. Dating to the early 1st millennium BC, it was the site that first brought the Khabur headwaters region on the modern border between Syria and Turkey to the attention of archaeologists worldwide. Presenting a selection of outstanding archaeological finds that caused a sensation when they were shown in Berlin in 2011, the exhibition brings to life the long-lost world of the Aramaeans. Monumental stone sculptures, fantastical reliefs and precious funerary goods testify to the wealth of the palace at Tell Halaf and other Aramaean residences. The exhibition traces Max von Oppenheim’s biography and his lifelong love for the East which sings from each and every one of the lavish oriental costumes and accessories he amassed in his private collection. The exhibition in Bonn is the first to present a sumptuous selection of these collector's items alongside the spectacular archaeological discoveries. The Tell Halaf finds – destroyed during a night-time bombing raid on Berlin in 1943 and painstakingly restored some sixty years later – tell the story of a 3000-year-old civilisation, but they have also become a poignant reminder of Germany’s recent history.

**AFRICAN MASTERS**
Great Artists from the Ivory Coast
27 June to 5 October 2014
Starting point of the exhibition is the general consensus among art historians today that in the so-called primitive societies – as indeed in any of the ancient civilisations of the western world – individual masters created unique works of the highest quality. A selection of approximately 180 masks, figures and everyday objects from Ivory Coast and neighbouring countries, created by exceptionally talented artists working in a wide range of fields, sheds new light on the role of the artist in African society. The exhibition sets out to place these outstanding works – created by great artists whose names by and large we no longer know – in an art historical context that is comparable to that of our great masters, from Michelangelo to Picasso.

An exhibition of the Art and Exhibition Hall of the Federal Republic of Germany in cooperation with Museum Rietberg Zürich
OUTER SPACE
Between Art and Science
3 October 2014 to 22 February 2015
A wide open realm of research and projections, outer space has always inspired a sense of yearning and curiosity. What is the origin of the universe? Where do we come from? Is there intelligent life on other planets? These questions spur philosophers and natural scientists, writers, filmmakers and artists, fantasists and visionaries in equal measure. There has always been an intense exchange between culture and science: scientific and technological findings have found their way into the work of artists, while conversely, visionary ideas and designs have inspired science. Outer Space investigates the interface between culture and science in 12 associative chapters that range from space travel artefacts, scientific exhibits and science fiction to the varied ways artists have responded to the subject throughout history.

An exhibition of the Art and Exhibition Hall of the Federal Republic of Germany, Bonn, in cooperation with German Aerospace Center (DLR)

Subject to change!

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