

# The Print Club of New York Inc

Winter 1997

## President's Greeting

*Julian Hyman*

The year 1996 has drawn to a close, and The Print Club of New York can look back on the successful completion of many of its goals. These include continuing the tradition of offering members a beautiful presentation print. This year the print was a color woodblock of the Brooklyn Bridge at night by the renowned artist, Richard Bosman. The Club also sponsored many unusual, interesting and educational events. We owe thanks to an active and enthusiastic Program Committee headed by Dr. Muriel Moss. These events included an in-depth panel discussion on WPA artists, a stimulating Artists Showcase held again at the beautiful National Arts Club, and a cocktail reception for members of Print Clubs from neighboring cities who attended the November IFPDA Print Fair.

Our quarterly newspaper increased in size and quality under the watchful eyes of our editor Arlyne Lesser and consultant Jean Melden.

Our membership roster is filled, and we have a modest waiting list for new membership. Board of Trustees member Glen Nelson developed an in-depth questionnaire which was sent to Club members. The information we will derive from the survey will aid us in charting our Club's future direction.

As for 1997, although attendance at Club meetings has increased, we still have not achieved the number of members attending each event that we would like. We hope to involve more members in the administration of the Club and its activities. Additionally, one of our goals for the future would be to find a modest permanent home for our organization.

At this time I want to thank the members of our Board of Trustees and all those other members who have helped make this past year a success. I also wish to express our condolences to Board of Trustees member Marian Deutsch on the loss of her mother, Elsie Deutsch.

A very happy and healthy New Year to all of you.

### **The Print Club of New York, Inc.**

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Arlyne Lesser  
Jean Melden

#### **Newsletter Editor:**

Arlyne Lesser

## 3rd Annual Artist's Showcase

*Jean Melden*

The Print Club of New York held its Third Annual Artists Showcase on October 1st in the Gallery of the National Arts Club. A knowledgeable and enthusiastic audience of PCNY members were introduced to six extraordinary artists.

The printmakers: Richard Sloat, Bill Behnken, Santi Moix, Alexander Zakharov, Debra Pearlman and Michael Whitaker Arike were chosen by the Program Committee through a rigorous selection process that included receiving suggestions from curators, dealers and members, visiting with artists to view and discuss their work and finally choosing those artists whose work they considered to be special, innovative and exciting.

Richard Sloat has not strayed too far from his start as a landscape artist. With the use of slides, he took us through the wonderful world of his imagination where he has created woodcuts of cities and areas that appear to be both real and fantasy.

The Spanish artist, Santi Moix, discussed the influence of Goya, Picasso and Tapies on his art. Through the use of etchings and woodcuts, he described how the time he spent in the jungle and his gypsy-like youth has affected his work.

As a lecturer and teacher, Bill Behnken gave a wonderful talk and slide presentation of his work. Drawing from his environment, and using the media of aquatint and mezzotint, he creates prints that have a luminescent quality. His work is in many museums and private collections.

Two artists have a common bond, their desire to express their feelings about the world they inhabit through their art. Debra Pearlman's work stretches the boundaries of reproductive techniques. Marilyn Kushner, Curator of Prints and Drawings at the Brooklyn Museum has called her prints photographic silk screens. Some of Ms Pearlman's most interesting prints, which were created as social statements, are printed on glass. The Russian artist, Alexander Zacharov, started making etchings two and a half years ago. His wood cuts were exhibited in Moscow when he was a student. His work expresses his perception of the contemporary world by artistic means similar to the tradition of old Dutch and German etchings.

The final artist to discuss and show her work was Michael Witaker Arike. An extremely interesting artist, she creates color aquatints. Using just three plates, she can get a full range of color and can almost duplicate what a painting can do. Another interesting aspect of her work is that she does not use black. Instead, by combining all colors, she can get a richer black effect.

At the end of all the presentations, PCNY members had the opportunity to examine the portfolios of prints brought by the artists and to visit with them. The Program Committee deserves both accolades and thanks for arranging this educational and delightful evening.

## Upcoming Print Club Events

**Thursday, Jan 16, 6:30 p.m.**

"Robert Motherwell Prints, A Retrospective Exhibition." Special membership viewing and gallery talk by Stephen Long at the Long Fine Art Gallery, 24 West 57th Street.

**Thursday, March 20, 6 p.m.**

"An Informal Evening With Currier and Ives." Gallery talk at The Old Print Shop, Inc., 150 Lexington Ave. The Old Print Shop is internationally recognized for its selection of Currier and Ives prints.

**Thursday, April 15, 7:30 p.m.**

"Trends in Contemporary Japanese Printmaking," a talk by Allison Tolman at the Liederkranz Club, 6 East 87th St. Ms. Tolman along with her parents, Mary and Norman Tolman, are leading authorities on the current state of Japanese printmaking.

**Friday, May 2, 6 p.m.**

Members are invited to an introductory lecture and walk-through with Jack Rennert of *Poster Auctions International* at a pre-auction exhibition of posters to be auctioned on Sunday, May 4. The lecture and exhibition will be held at the site of the auction, the auditorium of the Armenian Diocese Church, Second Avenue between 34th and 35th Streets. Mr. Rennert is recognized as an authority in the field of poster art.

first to adapt their selectively realist styles to the precise geometry of the burgeoning Machine Age, the Precisionists also spearheaded the revival of interest in America's fine art, folk art, and applied art traditions. Far from being a provincial phenomenon, Precisionism must also be seen within the international avant-garde context of the classicizing "call to order" after the destructive chaos of World War I. Thus the movement developed vital bridges between native traditions of realism and such European influences as Cezanne, Cubism and the Renaissance masters.

At the core of the Precisionist's classic, objectivist aesthetic was an exacting synthesis of realism and abstract design. They reordered local reality to reveal its universal, architectonic structures beneath the fluctuations of experience. Static, sharply defined, simplified, smoothly brushed or printed forms were rendered in unmodulated colors — disengaged from transitory aspects of painterly process, time, atmosphere, and sentiment. Suppressing anecdotal detail and the human presence to embrace the direct, impersonal apprehension of objects, the Precisionists were perhaps the most perceptive barometers of their era. Sometimes manifesting ambivalent attitudes towards mechanization, standardization, and dehumanization, they nevertheless adapted the clean lines and unadorned functional clarity of the urban-industrial environment. Finding these same attributes of beauty in early American rural architecture and folk art, the Precisionists established a vernacular heritage for the country's machine age.

### Origins of Precisionism (1915–1920)

In 1915, America's destiny as the next artistic center was proclaimed by Marcel Duchamp who observed that the art of war-torn Europe was dead: "Look at the skyscrapers! Has Europe anything to show more beautiful than these?" His colleague Francis Picabia concurred, "Since machinery is the soul of the modern world and since the genius of machinery attains its highest expression in 'America, why is it not reasonable to believe that in America the art of the future will flower most brilliantly?" Both Frenchmen were regular visitors to the New York home of the avant-garde collectors Walter and Louise Arensberg. There they met and influenced some of the young Americans later regarded as Precisionists: Sheeler, Demuth, Joseph Stella, and Morton Schamberg.

The first American to develop the potential of America's mechanistic environment into a Precisionist aesthetic was Schamberg. Reflecting the impact of Duchamp and Picabia, his precise, diagrammatic *Mechanical Abstraction* (1916) was based on a firsthand appreciation of a bookbinding wire-stitcher machine. Other significant, early examples of the Precisionist style include Sheeler's drawings of Bucks County barns in Pennsylvania, which, like his photographs of the same subjects, emphasize their architeconic presence. Demuth's architectural series were created in Bermuda in 1917 — the same year that Dickinson was praised for the "technical precision" of his paintings based on New York's urban views. The flat, simplified, hard edged planes of Synthetic Cubism contributed to all of their early Precisionist styles.

## Precisionism

**Gail Stavitsky,**

Curator of Collections and Exhibitions,  
The Montclair Art Museum

In 1927 and 1929, Alfred H. Barr, Jr., future director of New York's Museum of Modern Art, featured the work of Charles Sheeler and Charles Demuth as "The Precisionists" in his lectures on major tendencies in modern American painting. He and other critics coined this term to characterize stylistic, thematic consistencies among certain progressive artists who never actually formed a declared group or "school." Loosely linked through friendships and associations with particular New York galleries, these painters and photographers shared common sources of inspiration and aesthetic vocabularies.

By establishing links between America's past and present, the Precisionists affirmed the country's pervasive quest for national identity. Not only were they among the

## Development of Precisionism in the 1920's

In 1922, critic and historian Lewis Mumford proclaimed "the promise of a stripped...classical style...which shall embody all that is good in the Machine Age: its precision, its cleanliness, its hard illumination, its unflinching logic." One of the leading Precisionists Mumford admired was painter/printmaker Louis Lozowick who, along with Duchamp, Sheeler, Demuth, and the photographer Ralph Stienner, co-organized the landmark Machine Age Exposition of May 1927 in New York. Examples of modern art, architectural renderings, photographs of contemporary office and factory buildings, and a wide range of mechanical objects were juxtaposed. During the 1920's, New York gallery owner Charles Daniel regularly featured the Precisionist work of Demuth, Dickinson, Sheeler, and Niles Spencer, as well as the younger artists Henry Billings, Peter Blume, Elsie Driggs, and Charles Goeller. Exhibited at the Daniel Gallery in 1927, Driggs' masterful depiction of the *Queensborough Bridge* and a neighboring smokestack was hailed as a "clear and cerebral impression of the well-known structure, recognizing the rigid lines of the metal work..." By 1928, these Daniel Gallery artists were identified as a group with a distinct aesthetic: "Factories, sheds, bridges, and smokestacks loom large in the current Daniel showing, all rendered in the precise line, flat color, and clearly defined pattern that have become trademarks of the immaculate school."

The phrase "Immaculate School" continued to dominate criticism of the period, despite Alfred Barr's possible invention of the term "Precisionist" in 1927. Later that year, Sheeler began photographing the Ford Motor Company's River Rouge plant, creating a renowned series of sharp-focus images that would serve as the basis for several paintings in 1930-1931 for which he would be praised as a "Raphael of the Fords." Formerly viewed as celebrations of America's technological preeminence, these classic works have been recently interpreted as revealing the anxieties of individual identity in an increasingly mechanized, dehumanized, standardized era. Recognized as the leading member of the "Immaculate School," Sheeler defined his objectives in 1929 in precisionist terms: "Not to produce a replica of nature but to attain an intensified presentation of its essentials, through greater compactness of its formal design by precision of vision and hand..."

## Precisionism in the 1930s During the 1930s,

Precisionist directions in American art were increasingly varied within the complex Depression-period panorama of the American Scene, Regionalist, and modernist movements. With the Daniel Gallery's closing in 1932, Edith Halpert's Downtown Gallery in New York became the established showcase well into the 1960s. There, the work of Sheeler, Spencer, O'Keeffe, and newcomer Edmund Lewandowski represented the ongoing vitality of a movement that was abandoned by some (Driggs) or taken in other directions.

Some critics viewed Precisionism as an over-refined, inexpressive art that was out of contact with reality. Others regarded the key figures as contributing still vital,

modern expressions of American folk and fine art traditions. Halpert's beliefs in links between America's industrial present and its arts and crafts traditions was shared by Sheeler. In his *Home Sweet Home* (1931), Sheeler juxtaposed Shaker furniture and a traditional fireplace with a modern, streamlined oil burner — all objects in his house. For Sheeler, the same principles of precision, functional "simplicity of vision and directness of statement" governed the examples of modern and historical vernacular design that he himself collected.

## Defining Precisionism: The 1940s to the Present

During the 1940s, Precisionism entered the annals of history. Art historian Milton Brown published the first substantive article in 1945, renaming the movement Cubist-Realism to convey the movement's general evolution "from the use of simple abstract surfaces to the meticulous rendering of nature." German-born scholar Wolfgang Born in 1947 and 1948 published the first comprehensive studies employing the term "Precisionism" defined as "an art that was to combine the exactitude of photography with the geometrical interpretation of space introduced by cubism." In 1960 a pioneering survey exhibition of the movement was presented at the Walker Art Center, followed in 1982 by a show at the San Francisco Museum of Art which was the first to emphasize the integral connections between straight, sharp-focus, objectivist photography and Precisionist painting (Sheeler, Schamberg and Ralston Crawford were photographers as well as painters).

Building upon a vast amount of research, the 1994 exhibition originating at The Montclair Art Museum attempted to break new ground by presenting the full range of Precisionist subjects and styles in the context of the movement's most comprehensive examination to date. Paintings, drawings, prints and photographs of urban views, industrial and mechanical subjects, still lifes, rural, vernacular architecture and Americana were represented in styles ranging from semi-abstract to a meticulous, selective realism. Works by those artists immediately associated with Precisionism — Sheeler, Demuth, Dickinson, O'Keeffe, Spencer, Crawford, and Schamberg — were featured alongside lesser-known but significant artists such as Virginia Berresford, Earl Horte, Wade White, and Charles Goeller who had never before been presented in this context. The illustrated catalog accompanying the exhibition explored the multi-disciplinary aspects of the Precisionist phenomenon and is the only comprehensive text in print.

The end of Precisionism can be linked to the devastations of World War II which effectively destroyed machine age beliefs in industry as a beneficent force. Largely forgotten after the rise of Abstract Expressionism were the contributions of America's major generation of modernists between the wars. Forging a distinctive, universal synthesis of selective realism and solid, abstract design, the Precisionists' considerable achievements debunk lingering interpretations of this period as a time of nativist backlash and retreat from modernism, awaiting the so-called triumph of American art in the 1940's.

## Visiting Three International Graphic Art Exhibitions in Eastern Europe

Marvin Bolotsky

I have often envied those art and theatre aficionados who travel abroad for a few days to visit a special exhibition or see a few plays on the London stage. This past summer I indulged myself by visiting Eastern Europe for ten days in order to see three graphic art exhibitions. I flew to Warsaw first to view the International Poster Triennale at the famous Poster Museum, an extensive show in two buildings devoted exclusively to poster art. It was an exciting experience. The Japanese entries were the most sophisticated technically and among the most beautiful while the Polish examples, as poster collectors have come to expect, were the most visually exciting. Superb posters from all over the world graced the walls and free standing panels of this spacious museum. Print collectors who are in Warsaw should treat themselves to a visit to this museum in the Wilanow section of Warsaw.

After visiting an artist in Brest, Belarus, I returned to Poland to attend the International Small Format Graphic Triennale in Lodz. With approximately 3500 entries by more than 800 artists, the jury (which included Martin Levine, president of S.A.G.A.) chose 280 artists to be represented by approximately 1000 small format prints. The curator, Dr. Bernhard Kepler, mounted a superb exhibi-

tion on three floors of a beautiful Art Deco building, the Panstwowa Galeria Sztuki, in downtown Lodz, an industrial city two hours by train from Warsaw. The majority of printmakers were from Poland (53) with Japan represented by 21 artists and the U.S.A with 18. Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union were heavily represented while Australia, Bahrain, Israel, South America, Western Europe and Asia contributed the balance. The exhibition was a collector's dream with something for everyone — abstract, figurative, realistic, surrealistic prints in all media. The gallery also sells prints at modest prices.

From Lodz I visited Crakow, probably the most beautiful and well preserved city in Poland. There are several excellent art galleries, including prints and posters, in this cultural center. After an overnight stay, I took the train to Prague and the following day I left for the third show of interest to me in Chrudim, a lovely town near Prague. This was the XXVI (26th) Ex-Libris Congress which is held every two years. It was a four day gathering of artists and collectors of bookplates. Original etchings, engravings, lithographs and woodcuts were all represented. Among the approximately 700 attendees was Benoit Junod, a Swiss diplomat whose major hobby is collecting ex-libris prints. I asked this most knowledgeable collector to write about the world of ex-libris prints for our newsletter. His article follows.

## Ex-libris

Benoit Junod

Ex-libris (also called bookplates or Bucheignerzeichen in German) appeared in their printed form soon after Gutenberg invented mobile type in the mid-15th century. Libraries grew rapidly and books were precious. It is understandable that persons having a number of books wanted to mark their proud ownership with a small work of art pasted into them in which their coat-of-arms or name appeared rather than just making a manuscript inscription. This bibliophile tradition was given a strong initial response in Germany by major artists such as Durer, Cranach and the "Kleinmeister." All over Europe and over the centuries the tradition spread, many famous artists making ex-libris for their friends or by commission, among them Hogarth, Boucher, Goya, Picasso, Dali, Klee and Giacometti.

In the 18th century ex-libris changes from the mainly heraldic to the pictorial, and an infinite variety of motifs, approaches and techniques can be found. Collecting ex-libris started in the late 19th century. By 1900 there were close to a dozen societies of collectors in Europe. The usage of bookplates gradually changed and people started to commission a variety of ex-libris not only for pasting in their books, but also for exchange and collection. The American Society of Bookplate Collectors and Designers was founded in 1922. It publishes a quarterly newsletter called *Bookplates in the News* and encourages

contacts between collectors, artists and researchers on ex-libris. Further information can be obtained from the President, Audrey S. Arellanes, 605 N. Stoneman Ave., Apt. F, Alhambra, CA 91801.

The fascination of ex-libris lies in a variety of different aspects. They are graphic arts, and thus a historical collection reflects the whole evolution of graphic arts and styles over five hundred years. They are a source of bibliographical and sociological information which, through the book, is linked to the evolution of culture. For collectors, they are a relatively inexpensive way to accumulate original graphics by a wide range of contemporary artists. Above all, they are the result of a commission, of a direct contact between a bibliophile and an artist. They are the fruit of a meeting of minds and sensitivities and afford someone the extraordinary privilege to have a work of art especially created for him.

After the Second World War, the need was felt to set up an international federation of ex-libris collectors' societies. In 1966 FISAE was formed and under its auspices International Congresses have taken place every second year. This year the Congress was held in Chrudim and organized by the Czech association. Over 500 persons attended. Only a few participants were from the United States which is regrettable. Many collectors in the U.S. and in Britain are missing an interesting phase in the history of ex-libris, comparable to the brilliant wave of *The Studio* artists or the collectors' ex-libris phase of the 1920's in

Germany (Klinger, Ritter, Heroux, Helfenbein) which was missed by most of the rest of Europe.

The work being shown in the Baroque hall of the Chrudim Museum brought one quickly to the conclusion that the best ex-libris from a technical and artistic point of view today are the eastern European examples, especially those by Russian, Czech, Slovak, Baltic and Ukrainian artists. There continues a prevalent interest in intaglio over relief or flatbed techniques. Excellent artists were present at the Congress, and one particularly noted the recent striking improvement in quality of Italian ex-libris. A fascinating exhibition of ex-libris by the Czech master Josef Vachal (1884-1969) included many colour wood-engravings, a most complex and exacting graphic discipline.

Like all FISAE Congresses, Chrudim enabled visitors to observe the state of the art of bookplates, to acquire interesting material by purchase or exchange, to meet many interesting artists without the often tedious intermediary of a gallery or lengthy correspondence, to learn more about the bookplate history of the host country, and to meet and exchange views with a wide range of prominent international collectors.

The XXVII Congress will take place in St. Petersburg in 1998. It is hoped that many members of the American Society as well as others interested in ex-libris, will attend the St. Petersburg Congress.

Note: Benoit Junod is a Swiss diplomat whose major hobby is collecting ex-libris. For over 25 years he has built up a historical collection of almost 35,000 bookplates which is considered one of the finest world-wide. He has organized several international competitions and exhibitions of ex-libris, one of which the *World of Ex-libris* is presently on view in Glasgow, Scotland.

## Fall Membership Events

### Richard Bosman Speaks to Print Club

A large and enthusiastic audience came to hear Richard Bosman at the first fall membership event on September 17. Mr. Bosman spoke on the evolution of his career as a printmaker as well as the creation of the 1996 Presentation Print, "Brooklyn Bridge," which he showed in Artist's Proof to the membership.

Using a variety of original prints as well as slides, Mr. Bosman illustrated the various stages of his work since he began printmaking in 1979-80, the sources of his subject matter, and his changes in technique.

Although Mr. Bosman has also worked in etching and lithographic techniques, he prefers woodcut because of the simple, direct use of the cutting tools which create light out of the darkness of the board. Among the subjects which have interested him have been psychological, dramatic subjects such as suicide and falling, subjects which allowed him to develop a nightmarish, "noire" feeling; natural images such as fog on the water or the night sky which characterizes his work done while living in the country, and the New York City waterfront and bridges. His most recent subjects are fishing and fishermen, another

aspect of his continuing interest in water. In closing the evening by showing the preliminary drawings and the Artist's Proof of the "Brooklyn Bridge" print, Mr. Bosman commented that like Hiroshige he would like to do 100 views of the bridges of New York.

## Hospitality Room at the Print Fair

The Print Club of New York hosted a hospitality room on Friday, November 8 at the 67th Street Armory. We invited PCNY members and members of the Print Clubs of Albany, Cleveland, Rochester, Washington and Detroit. November 8th was the first day of the Print Fair sponsored by the International Fine Print Dealers Association.

Despite the bad weather and a faulty elevator that made us walk up four flights of stairs, the evening was well attended with over forty people present. Members from the Cleveland Print Club reciprocated with an invitation to visit their annual Print Fair in October. The Cleveland club offered to put together a program for us which would include visits to the Cleveland Museum of Art and the viewing of private collections. Jane Glaubinger, Curator of Prints and Photographs at the Cleveland Museum of Art, was among our guests.

## Conservation Framing Seminar at Bark Frameworks

Members who attended the November 21 talk by Jared Bark of Bark Frameworks on conservation framing came away with a wealth of information on proper framing techniques. Mr. Bark commented that just as twenty years ago there had been an explosion of new conservation matting materials that addressed the problem of acid burn, so now there is a similar explosion of glazing materials to address some of the problems connected with the use of UV plexiglass. For example, he believes that plexiglass should not be used with pastels or prints on thin Japanese style paper because of static electricity which may pull off the surface of the pastel pigment and endanger the fragile paper.

Mr. Bark concluded that even though conservation framing may cost 20% more than regular framing, it is a worthwhile investment in that it preserves the integrity and value of a collector's works of art.

## Members Participate in "Swap, Sale and Appraisal"

On December 4, members attended a "Swap, Sale and Appraisal" event held at the Liederkrantz Club on East 87th Street. Robert Newman of the *Old Print Shop* and James Goodfriend of *C&J Goodfriend Drawing and Prints* graciously agreed to offer appraisals. We were fortunate to obtain the services of these well-known experts in their fields, and a number of members took advantage of their expertise to have their prints appraised and/or authenticated. Several unsigned prints

were also identified for their fortunate owners.

Additionally, members brought prints from their collections for sale. This informal event provided an opportunity for members to get together and talk about their collections. Although the turn-out was light, those attending had a most informative and enjoyable evening.

## A Five Year Retrospective of Russian Printmaking at the Mimi Ferzt Gallery

**T**he Mimi Ferzt Gallery which specializes in Russian art hosted a reception and special viewing for Print Club members of its exhibit, "The Moscow Studio, 1991-96, a Five Year Retrospective of Printmaking." The exhibition was held in conjunction with the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, DC, and featured the work of artists from the non-profit workshop established in 1991.

Dennis O'Neill, Executive Director of the studio presented an overview and called on a number of artists to talk about their work. It was a fascinating evening as we followed artist after artist who explained what they were trying to do, what technical means they had used and how distinctively Russian elements were expressed through sophisticated western techniques. The variety and wide range of subject matter and style were testimony to the explosion of talent and the vigor of printmaking in Russia today.

## News and Notes

Reba White Williams was awarded a Ph.D in Art History from the Graduate Center, CUNY, on October 1. Her dissertation topic was *The Weyhe Gallery Between the Wars, 1919-1940*, and is available from University Microfilms Inc., 800-521-0600. Ms. Williams serves on the New York City Art Commission, reporting to Mayor Giuliani, and was recently appointed by Governor Pataki to the New York State Council on the Arts.

Julian and Elaine Hyman loaned three prints to the recent exhibition at the Montclair Art Museum, "Hidden Treasures: New Jersey Collectors at the Montclair Art Museum". Dr. and Mrs. Hyman have also recently donated prints and drawings from their collection to the Montclair Museum, the Brooklyn Museum and the Museum of the City of New York.

David Mickenberg, Director of the Mary and Leigh Block Gallery at Northwestern University, was co-curator of the exhibition "Emigrants and Exiles: A Lost Generation of Austrian Artists in America, 1920-1950" which was exhibited at the Austrian National Gallery in Vienna and at the Block Gallery. He was also co-author of the exhibition catalog.

Call or write to us if you have interesting news you want to share. Call (201) 567-0170 or write to Editor, The Print Club of New York, Inc., 119 Buckingham Road, Tenafly, NJ 07670.

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