



LES JARDINS ENCHANTÉS DE JEAN COCTEAU



PALAIS DE L'EUROPE
galerie des **musées**

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Du 28 mars 2026 au 30 janvier 2027
Ouvert tous les jours du mardi au samedi
de 10h à 12h et de 14h à 18h sauf jours fériés

Jean Cocteau, Visage de face et double profil, projet pour une tapisserie, 1963
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musée Jean Cocteau
collection Séverin Wunderman

COMITÉ
Jean Cocteau
✱



PRESS KIT

THE ENCHANTED GARDENS OF JEAN COCTEAU

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The Mayor of Menton invites you to explore the new exhibition at the Galerie des musées, at the Palais de l'Europe, **The Enchanted Gardens of Jean Cocteau**.

PRESENTATION OF THE EXHIBITION

"The Côte d'Azur is the greenhouse where the roots grow. Paris is the shop where flowers are sold."

Jean Cocteau

In Menton, the Villa and gardens of Les Colombières were decorated by Ferdinand Bac who published a book devoted to this estate: *Jardins enchantés, Un romancero*. The link with Jean Cocteau is particularly known since the poet was introduced to drawing by his friend.

This new exhibition will present the Séverin Wunderman collection of the Jean Cocteau Museum in Menton through the theme of gardens.

In many of Jean Cocteau's works of visual art or film, plants are a source of inspiration. More than a decor, its strangeness translates the mystery of life and the porosity between man and the world. Plants breathe, come to life, and become a mirror of the soul.

The film *Beauty and the Beast* (1946) takes place in a fantastic domain where plants seem to have a soul. The arms of the candelabras stretch like branches, the curtains ripple like lianas, and the Beast's home changes into an enchanted garden where stone, flesh and foliage merge. The vegetation symbolises the power of metamorphosis, a central theme for Cocteau: man changes into monster, death changes into beauty, the rose becomes a face.

In Cocteau's drawings, vegetation is populated by fantastic animals. He brings them to life in his personal mythology, in poetic and humorous series. The Mediterranean, the cradle of Greece, is also a source of inspiration.

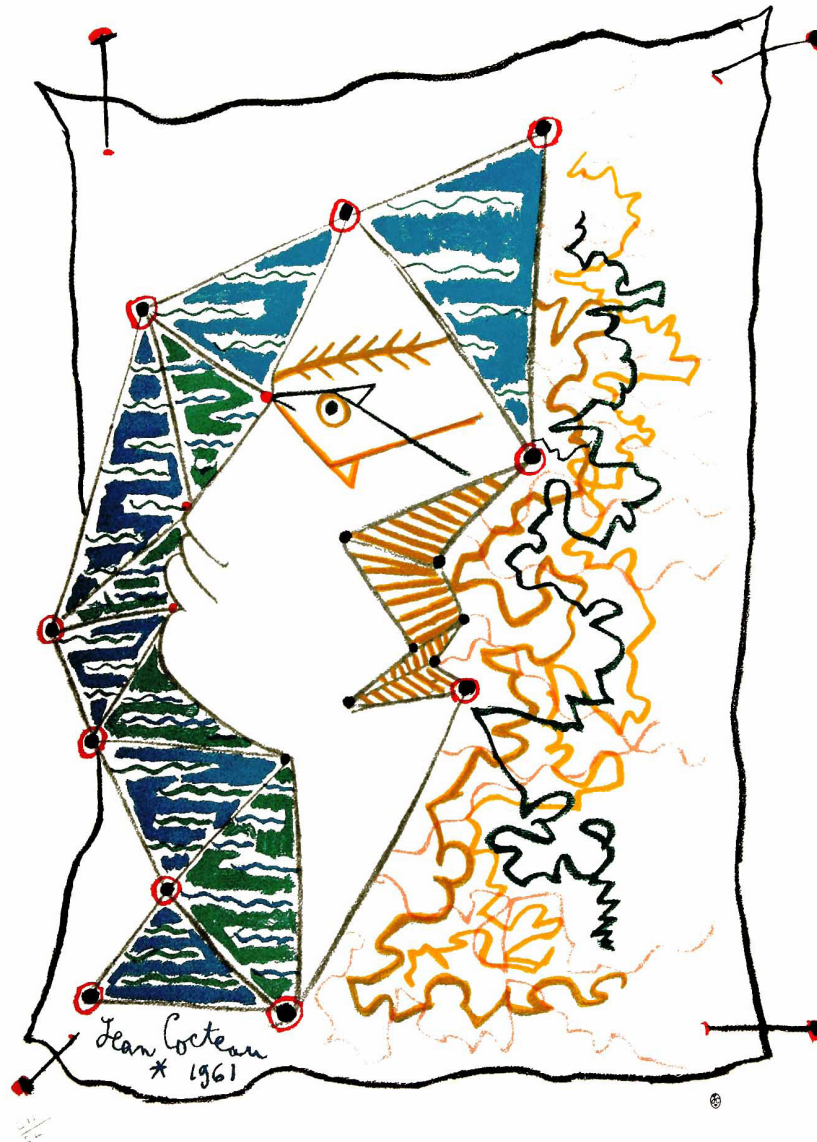
A whole dreamlike world full of mysteries! The metaphor for poetry itself!

The scenography was designed by Ahmad Reshad, artist and set designer.

Ahmad Reshad, a post-master's graduate of the Pavillon Bosio ESAP Monaco – Art & Scenography, designs scenographic projects for cultural and artistic institutions.

Among his recent projects: the scenography of the exhibition *Système solaire* at the Village Charlot in Beausoleil; the scenography of a artwork by Marcel Duchamp for the Nouveau Musée National de Monaco; and the scenography of an exhibition dedicated to Niki de Saint Phalle for the Musée d'Art Moderne et d'Art Contemporain de Nice, along with numerous other scenographic projects.

At the same time, he was an artist-in-residence at the Cité internationale des arts in Paris in 2025 and at the Ateliers du Quai Antoine 1^{er} in 2024 in Monaco. His artistic work has also been presented in various contexts, including OVNi – Festival International d'Art Vidéo and the 16th edition of the Mulhouse Biennale dedicated to young creation.



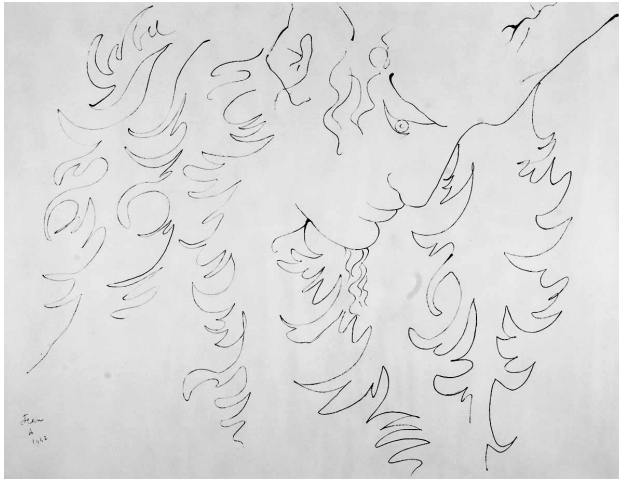
Jean Cocteau, Profil à l'œil poisson, 1961, chromolithographie sur papier



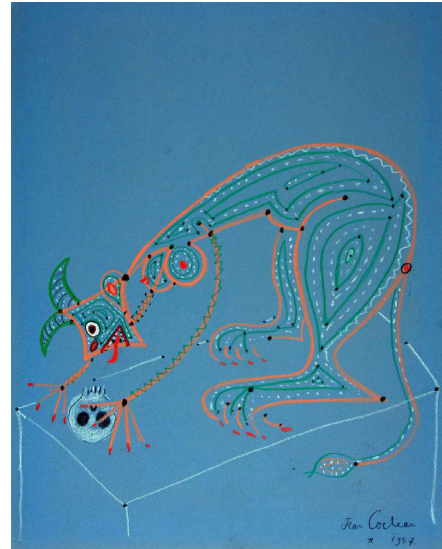
Jean Cocteau, Faune jouant de la flûte, 1958-1960, pastel sur papier Canson bleu



Jean Cocteau, Faune et nymphe, 1952 lithographie sur papier



Jean Cocteau, Licorne, 1947, lithographie sur papier



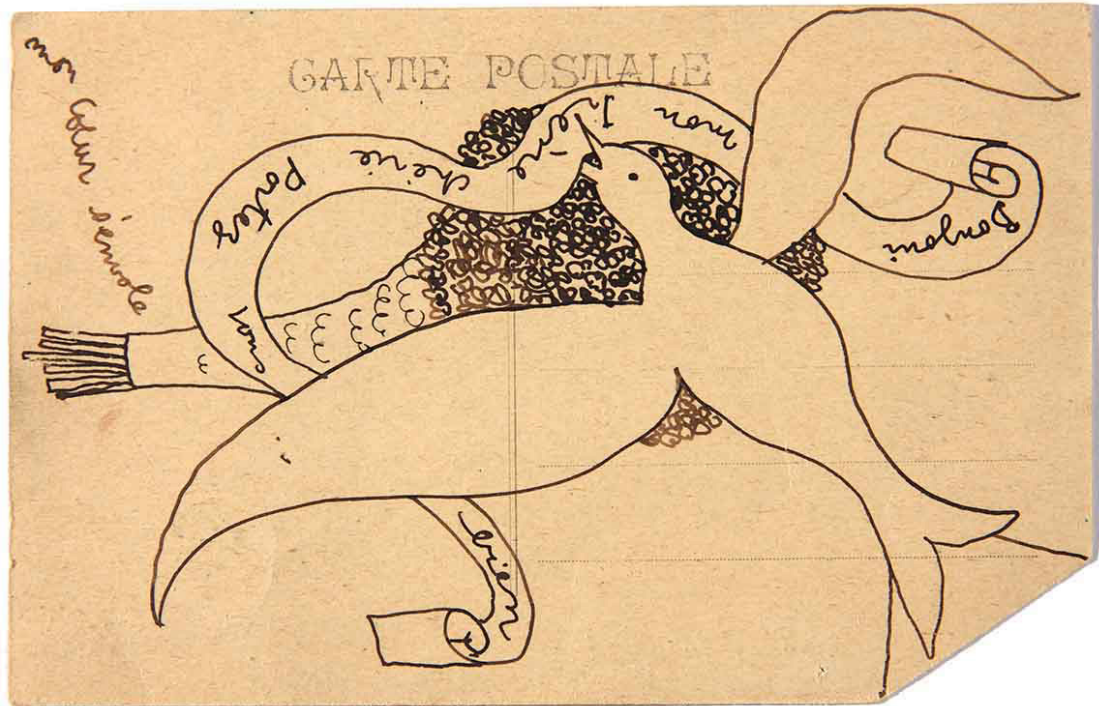
Jean Cocteau, Animal fantastique, 1957 crayon gras sur papier Canson bleu

THE EXHIBITION TRAIL

In this second hanging at the Museum Gallery, we invite you to walk through the imaginary gardens of Jean Cocteau. You will also discover works by contemporary artists inspired by nature: Claude Como, Kim Boulukos, Yvonne Bilis Régnier, Éric Massholder (represented by the Kamil Gallery, Monaco).

Through two loans from the Museum of Fine Arts in Menton we can admire paintings by Ferdinand Bac. It is also an opportunity to present a very beautiful painting by Marie Vassilieff, and works by Françoise Gilot, Fabrizio Clerici and Raymond Moretti...

The trail has four sequences, two of which have subsequences: from epistolary exchanges with his friends to the exuberance of Southern gardens.



Jean Cocteau, carte postale illustrée à Irène Lagut, n.d. encre sur papier

First Sequence of the Trail: *Floral and Friendly Letters from Jean Cocteau and His Friends*

This first sequence shows the importance of the epistolary exchange, at the time, between Jean Cocteau and his friend Irène Lagut and between Valentine Hugo and Hubert de Saint-Senoche. Through these two examples, we can understand the bonds of friendship woven by the poet and his artistic entourage. The elegance and beauty of these letters show the careful ornamentation by their authors with reference to nature: animals, insects, etc..

For Jean Cocteau, epistolary exchange occupies a central place, structural and fully integrated into his work, to the point that it can be considered not as a simple peripheral document, but as an extension of his creative activity. It is an aesthetic laboratory, freer than published work, free from editorial constraints. We find his taste for brilliance, brief formulations, paradox, and thought in motion, often more immediate than in his theoretical texts.

Cocteau maintained sustained exchanges with artists, musicians, writers, and patrons: Picasso, Radiguet, Max Jacob, Diaghilev, Satie, Gide, Éluard, Chanel, and other no less famous people, but we chose these letter-poems to Irène Lagut, his friend, creator of sets for *Les Mariés de la Tour Eiffel* in 1921 and whom he met in the South from 1950 (donation of correspondence to the museum in 1983). They are indicative of the construction of the intellectual and emotional network that Cocteau wove.

Hubert de Saint-Senoche was part of this network. Both frequented Parisian literary and aesthetic circles.

The poet's relationships with Valentine Hugo are at the same time artistic, emotional, intellectual and characterised by real closeness.

We also show, through Valentine Hugo's letters to Hubert de Saint-Senoche, the relationship woven between these two beings, more intimate and based on personal trust, enabling this creative space manifested during festivities.

Second Sequence of the Trail: *Myths Revisited: Fauns and Nymphs - Unicorns*

In the work of Jean Cocteau, the common thread is his modern reinterpretation of ancient myths. He adapts them to transpose them into new forms for his time, through the prism of his personal poetic universe where symbol and aesthetics are combined.

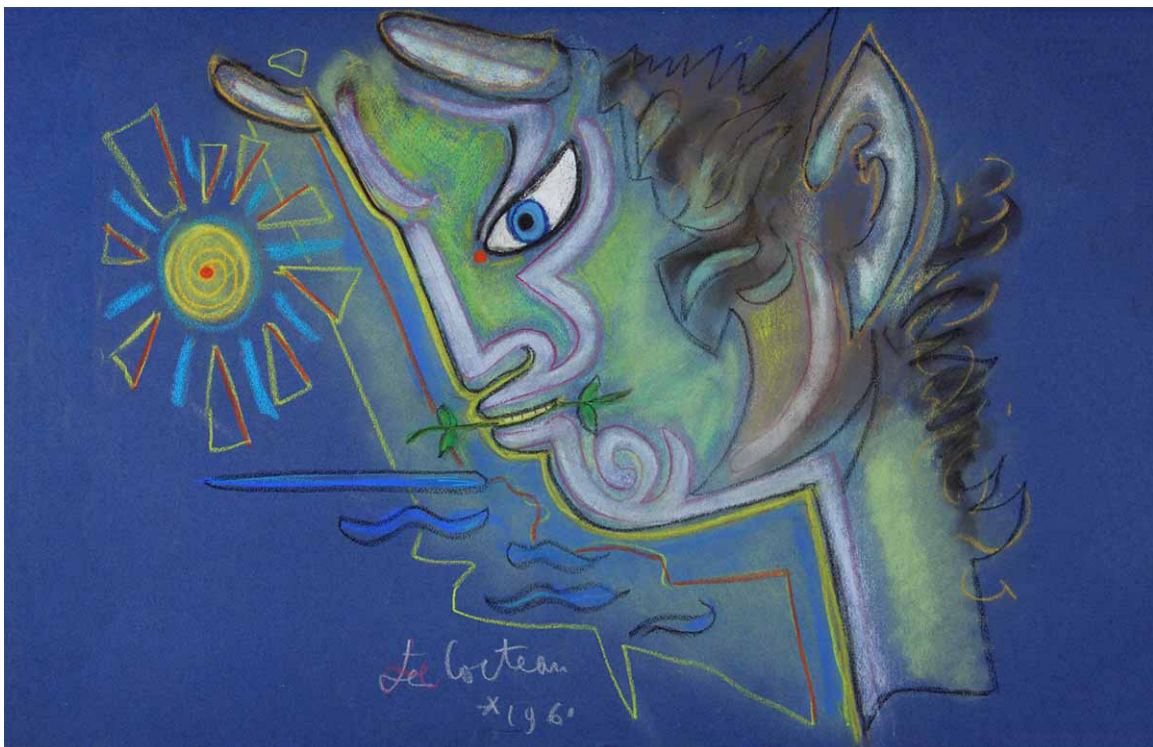
One of his favourite figures is Orpheus, his alter-ego. The artist transforms his descent into the Underworld into an inner exploration: he is the incarnation of the poet capable of crossing the border between life and death.

In the film *Beauty and the Beast*, Cocteau treats Madame Leprince de Beaumont's tale as an initiatory myth in which cinematographic processes create an impression of magical wonder.

Drawings of *fauns* occupy a special place in Jean Cocteau's graphic work from the 1950s until the end of his life. These half-man half-boy figures from Graeco-Roman mythology serve him less to illustrate antiquity than to explore a personal visual art language based on line and suggestion, sometimes tinged with humour. He often traces these rustic creatures with a continuous stroke, capturing movement rather than anatomy. As for the *nymphs*, Cocteau stylises their curves to the extreme to give an ethereal and timeless effect.

As for *unicorns*, the artist worked in series from the second half of the 1940s. These are not recurring but occasional motifs in his graphic work. The mythical animal represents a condensed symbol of his poetic vision: purity, mystery and power are brought together in a form of extreme simplicity. Traced by a sure hand, the single horn, the central element of the myth, is often accentuated, becoming a symbolic axis linking the earthly to the spiritual. This fantastic animal also sometimes has a heraldic and monumental dimension.

For Cocteau, these figures become graphic and poetic archetypes, emerging from antiquity but inscribed in the modern avant-garde. They reflect his fascination with the areas of passage: between dream and reality, animality and spirituality.



Jean Cocteau, Faune, 1961, pastel sur papier Canson bleu



Jean Cocteau, *Beethoven et les Dames du silence*, 1962, crayon graphite sur papier

Third Sequence of the Trail: *Dreams and Fantastic Bestiaries*

Fantasy is present in all of Jean Cocteau's work because his art is based on what he himself called a "logic of the wonderful". He transposes dreams in his drawings through the fluidity of the boundaries between life and death, the abolition of linear time, the presence of animate objects and narration. We have chosen to show his fantasy through particularly poetic works.

The series of large studies of *Beethoven et les dames du silence* reflects this.

In the autumn of 1961, Jean Cocteau was commissioned for a thirty-metre painting by the Beethoven Festival in Bonn. The sponsor was Edouard Calic.

He undertook seven different studies of the musician's face in the middle of the nine symphonies, in a kind of underwater atmosphere. Through the movement of his composition as well as through the shimmering colours he uses, he suggests how the composer had to imagine the music he created despite his deafness. Unfortunately, the organisers of the festival did not follow up on this project, but it was thanks to the donation of Séverin Wunderman's collection in 2005 in Menton that these drawings came to the Jean Cocteau Museum.

Fantastic Bestiaries (1957-1960) are never decorative for Jean Cocteau. They often resemble sphinxes or horned beasts.

In his clear, almost calligraphic, line drawings they appear stripped of any naturalistic detail. The animal appears with a lion's body, a human face and sometimes suggested wings. The hybrid being half-human half-monster is the very symbol of the mystery of poetic creation and more broadly of any work of art. They are resurgences from the artist's travels in the Middle East.

Fourth sequence of the Trail: Gardens of the South: *Figure of the Living - Mediterranean*

Jean Cocteau stayed on many occasions in the South of France. He was hosted from 1950 at the Villa Santo Sospir in Saint-Jean-Cap-Ferrat by his patron Francine Weisweiler.

The South was an opportunity for the poet to make his mark in monumental works from Menton to Fréjus... he "tattooed" the walls.

He had a deep connection with the Côte d'Azur, a region he adopted as a creative and inspiring refuge. His favourite place was the city of Menton and its Mediterranean gardens. Fascinated by light, colours and lush vegetation, he found a playground for his imagination.

For Cocteau, these places were spaces of poetic experience where nature and art came together. His drawings were then populated with various animals: cockerels, eagles and fish etc..

His work became a tribute to the Mediterranean: the sky and the sea create a continuum between the real and the imaginary. It is not only a set: she became a character in her own right, loaded with symbols as his *Profils à l'œil poisson* attest.

His Menton *Innamorati* series reflects the joy of life he felt living on this coast.



Jean Cocteau, *Innamorati*, Le pêcheur et la jeune fille au bord de la mer, 1961
Crayon gras sur papier Canson



Jean Cocteau, Visage de face et double profil, Projet pour une tapisserie, 1963, encre de Chine, crayon graphite sur papier

SHORT BIOGRAPHY OF JEAN COCTEAU (1889-1963)

- 1889** Jean Cocteau was born on July 5 in Maisons-Laffitte. He grew up in a sophisticated, artistic and cultured environment.
- 1909** He met with great success in literary circles, introduced in particular by Édouard De Max. He published his first collection of poems, *La Lampe d'Aladin*, as well as articles and drawings in *Comœdia*.
- 1913** The premiere of *The Sacrament of the Spring*, a ballet composed by Stravinsky and choreographed by Nijinski, transports him. The hostility of the public strengthens the idea in him that there is only non-conformist artistic creation.
- 1917** The first performance of *Parade*, a ballet created with Satie and Picasso, and performed by the Ballets Russes, surprised the public and critics.
- 1921** Première of *Les Mariés de la tour Eiffel*, which was disrupted by the Dadaists. Cocteau undertakes the adaptations of *Antigone* and *Oedipus Rex*.
- 1923** He published *Le Grand Écart* and *Thomas l'Imposteur*. He was very affected by Radiguet's brutal death on December 12.
- 1924** He published a collection of drawings dedicated to Picasso. He wrote the poem *L'Ange Heurtebise* and *Le Mystère de Jean l'Oiseleur*.

- 1925** Cocteau meets Jean Bourgoing and his sister Jeanne, whose room inspired the set for *Les Enfants terribles*.
- 1929** He wrote *Les Enfants terribles* in seventeen days, a novel which received a very positive reception.
- 1930** Shooting of his first film *Le Sang d'un poète. Opium, journal d'une désintoxication*, appears in bookstores.
- 1937** During an audition for *Œdipe roi*, he noticed Jean Marais.
- 1942** Cocteau frequents Picasso, Éluard a lot, and works on the cinema.
- 1945** Filming of *Beauty and the Beast*, which was released in 1946 and won the Louis-Delluc Prize.
- 1947** With Jean Marais, he bought a house in Milly-la-Forêt, met Édouard Dermit and wrote the screenplay for *Orphée*.
- 1948** Cinema is still in the foreground with the filming of *Les Parents terribles*. He starts tapestry (*Judith and Holophernes*).
- 1949** Cocteau films *Orphée*. On September 3, he was made a chevalier de la Légion d'honneur.
- 1950** He stayed for the first time in Saint-Jean-Cap-Ferrat in the Weisweiler villa, Santo Sospir, the walls of which he tattooed.
- 1953** He chairs the jury of the Cannes Film Festival. He publishes at Bruckmann editions (Germany) the book *Démarche d'un poète* illustrated with 17 drawings.
- 1954** He suffered a heart attack. He is introduced to the techniques of pastel.
- 1955** Candidate for the French Academy, he was elected in the first round of voting.
- 1956** He began the decoration of the Saint-Pierre chapel in Villefranche-sur-Mer and the wedding hall of the City Hall in Menton.
- 1957** Bernard Buffet illustrates *La Voix humaine*, a play written by Cocteau in 1927. He was introduced to pottery at the Madeline-Jolly workshop in Villefranche-sur-Mer.
- 1958** The Menton wedding hall was inaugurated on March 22. He is working on the Bastion renovation project to exhibit his visual art work.
- 1959** He shot *Le Testament d'Orphée* in Baux-de-Provence and Nice.
- 1960** He was elected Prince of Poets.
- 1963** He left Santo Sospir and went to Milly-la-Forêt where he died on October 11. He was buried on October 16 in the Saint-Blaise-des-Simples chapel that he had decorated.
- 1966** On April 30, his museum-testament at the Bastion de Menton was inaugurated.

CURATOR OF THE EXHIBITION

Sandrine Faraut Ruelle

Head of the Jean Cocteau Collection Séverin Wunderman Museum

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USEFUL INFORMATION

The Enchanted Gardens of Jean Cocteau

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Open to the public from Saturday, March 28, 2026 until January 30, 2027

The museum gallery is open every day, from Tuesday to Saturday,
From 10 am to 12 noon and from 2 to 6 pm except holidays

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