2017 MFA GRADUATE THESIS EXHIBITION

vcuarts
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CRAFT/MATERIAL STUDIES

Fumi Amano
Grace Kubilius
Chelsea Lee
Stephen Nunes
Shannon M. Slaight-Brown
Voice
Old window frames, wood, sheet glass
I’ve focused my attention on the realities of Japanese women’s place in Japan, and come to realize many things. “We” have always done all of the housework, kept the house clean and the family healthy. Why is this “unpaid” job still limited almost exclusively to women? What I can say about feminism as a Japanese woman living in the United States? Since moving to the United States three years ago I have faced many problems due to people’s preconceptions about Japanese women. The worst of these misconceptions generally come from American men, who believe that Japanese women are “easy,” submissive, innately passive, and quiet. As a response to these generalizations, I created a complex glass house to perform inside. The shape of house and the windows are constructed in a distorted manner to reflect the misunderstanding between people. I will perform inside as a housewife and sometimes draw and write messages to the viewers who are directly in front of me. Through this performance, I am expressing my feelings of loneliness, irritation, and my struggle to survive. Through my fleeting “messages” I create for the viewer, I hope to connect more intimately with people in hopes of overcoming invisible barriers and go beyond our differences.

Fumi Amano
Pebbles Is a Girl That Doesn’t Know Anything
Mixed media
I am not quite sure how to be a woman. It’s complicated, contradictory, and highly surveilled. I make videos, sculptures, and wearable objects that attempt to rationalize my female identity. The body is a sustained fixture in my work: as an armature, as an absent actor for constructed environments, as fragment, and as the literal inclusion of my image. It is through these various modes of dis/embodiment that I negotiate the complexities of gendered existence. Crumbling ceramic and paper objects, pieced fabric forms, videos, beauty products, and delicate flowers reference splintered narratives and unwieldy terrains. The textile acts as a latent body: soft, slumping, hairy, and unruly. It is uncontrollable and controlled. It has the potential to hold memory: it folds, wrinkles, and retains marks, recording its own existence. My textiles serve as a stand-in for a body: marked, acted upon, or postured in a built environment. Through video, I focus on the body/image as a site for considering concepts of continuous gender construction and perpetual performance. I consider the idea of pink, not exclusively as color but as a framework for the perpetual performance of the body. Largely using my own body and occasionally other performers, I explore actions of touching, pinching, caressing, slapping, groping, kissing as ways of marking the body. Collectively, these interactions with self, other and object reiterate the complexity of representation.

Grace Kubilius
SUB FOR MORE (installation)
(above) Cell Phone Charging Station
Wood, cell phone charging port

(right) Becoming Kim (projected video)
Projected video, ceramic, led lights
What's good?

I'm the kind of person who accidentally stays up bleary-eyed till 3 in the morning, my face washed with sick blue light knowing I can't tell anyone about this. This is not good. It's not GOOD to walk into a room and only want to ask people how they feel about Natalie Portman (overrated). It's not good to sit down at a table of colleagues and ask them what they think Justin Bieber is doing right now.

It's not good.
It's nothing to be proud of.

Since 2013 I've gotten irrationally angry at people who don't like Miley Cyrus (bangers 4 lyfe).

I get a sick feeling in my gut when I see the way people look at me once they know what kind of culture I'm into. I'm tired of feeling ashamed. I'm tired of pretending that I'm intellectual in the same way that other people are.

I'm angry enough now that I can push that sickness out into the work I make. I think it's going to be GOOD this time.
Planar Refrains
Sound, plate reverb units, utility carts, diffusion floor surface, industrial felt, speaker cabinets, amplifiers, audio cables
Stephen Nunes
My practice organizes constructed instruments into mutable, relational systems of installation, movement, and documentation. The tools I make function within variable formats and are implemented as both physical barriers and thresholds into alternate, virtual domains. Overlapping fragmented and ephemeral intensities of sound or moving images within my material assemblages, I hope to offer a nexus of superimposed spatialities. Within this compounded space, my work values the embodied perspective of the viewer as a charged site through which durational aesthetic experiences can be discovered. The limitations of the human sensory system allow for speculation into the interstices of unknown potentials beyond objective perception. Through the reciprocal engagement of phenomenological inquiry and intuitive material experimentation, I aim to access these interstices as points of contemplation. Natural reverb, the ghostly refrain of a sound calling back to our ears from a distant plane, can intensify our emotional experience of place. My project Plate Refrains utilizes four electro-mechanical reverb plates, analog audio filters used to simulate expansive acoustic arenas. Historically these devices have lent emotive voicings to popular studio recordings, dislocating the performer from the commercial studio and into a simulated reverberant territory of mythic proportions. The material properties of steel are applied to a signal, shaping the sound of a human performance into something more transformative, a sound embodying otherworldly dynamics. In subverting the designed utility of reverb plates, I am exploring their utility and materiality as active surfaces extending across different spatial realities.
(above) **Impressed**
Colored porcelain, granular ilmenite, cherry wood

(right top) **Duality**
Colored porcelain, Illinois local clay, Virginia local clay, and glaze

(right bottom) **My Albatross**
Porcelain, red earthenware, glaze, acrylic, paracord, graphite
Shannon M. Slaight-Brown
The marks or patterns I make in clay have different characteristics. The physical mark of one’s fingertips or visual record of the hand is personal and intimate, as is the deliberate removal of this action. These conscious actions are the physical evidence of my presence within each object. Pattern to me is not only visual, but also physical. It has its own discrete visual language and modes of communication; through this I’m developing a method of inter-communication. The conversation is frequently modular, disconnected, and familiar allowing for discovery and curiosity between these relationships. They allude to a sense of harmony, conflict, or transcendence at distinct moments in time, often-referencing accumulation, a timeline, or a collection. These are ways I mark or evaluate myself, measuring my status, and my progress in the world. I repetitively systematize; repetition is significant because of my personal narrative applied within each of my works. I believe it helps me understand and move more honestly through the space in which I live. I am creating a constant categorization of my experiences of the self in order to relate to others, which in turn gives me purpose for the work and my life. In doing this, I am not only able to freely share my beliefs and struggles, but I also construct an environment or system for my audience to generate a relationship to the work and ultimately to myself.

I Forgive You
Porcelain
KINETIC IMAGING

Joana Stillwell
Russell White
Yidan Xie
(left) a pause, a pink rectangle, a light fixture, string (detail)
Looping video projection, white rectangle, light fixture, string, mirror window film square

(right top) a sunbeam, a light at 6500K
Looping video projection, programmable color light bulb

(right bottom) i like a slumpy object (sunrise)
Speaker color light bulb, packing material, white plexiglass, looping snoring (of partner, mother, friend, friends of friends, partners of friends, cat of friend, dog of friend)
I use video and material fragments to investigate the collapse of virtual and physical spaces as memories, lived environments, and digital interfaces become overlaid and interchangeable. I am interested in the capacity for technology to propose alternative strategies in which to engage with the world as we continue to extend ourselves in new and enduring methods. Seemingly unremarkable fragments offer new potentials in questioning meaning, worth, and care within spaces of downtime, boredom, and play.

Joana Stillwell

Sand dollars, tiles, a pink square, a happy light
Inhales, exhales, the Atlantic
Found wood, rose essential oil
A sunrise, pink rectangle, a light fixture, string
Boats, ripples, a white sheet
A light bulb, packing material, snoring
Thirty sunrises in an hour
Xenirrrtz
Foam board, single channel projection
Currently, my work brings digital landscapes into our experienced physical world by use of surface and projection. The monitor to creates new surfaces for a canvas, which I can improvisationally shape. I generate video textures, for projection, from obsolete video editing equipment I have modified and circuit bent to perform outside its normative function. This allows for broken signals or “glitches” to occur, which produces saturated color fields and moments of flicker. When combined, these elements produce a tableau of digital worlds crossing over into our own.

Russell White
The Classic of Mountains and Seas
Experimental animation projection
Yidan Xie

I am a multimedia artist working in video, animation, illustration and sound. In my work, a mysterious and fantastic visual experience is presented. Recently, I have begun to investigate possibilities of narrative and relationships between women, nature, and mythology.

Inspiration for much of my work comes from poetry and literature; through reading these texts, imagery will come to mind. I often create drawings based on found images and through this process a narrative will gradually be constructed. The titles of my works are the same as, or similar to, the books I take inspiration from, such as *The Street of Crocodiles*, *Innisfree*, and *The Classic of Mountain and Seas*. I enjoy the process of creating a transition from the text to image or sound, which has become my personal method of creation.

For sound work, I attempt to uncover a narrative that does not involve written or spoken language, as sound has the ability to create its own story or narrative. My sound works draw from narrative, but they are not strictly interpreting the dramatic arc of the work of fiction that I am responding to. My hope is that by listening to one of my sound pieces, the audience can imagine their own inner narrative.
PAINTING + PRINTMAKING

Wesley Chavis
Sarah Coote
Jon Rehwoldt
Ricardo Vicente Jose Ruiz
Ryan Syrell
María Tinaut
Room of The Future Body, Our Family Vestige
HD digital video, audio recording, olive oil soaked plywood sheathing, shipping pallet, stained bed sheet, and photograph
Through the image, voice, and remnants of the intergenerational Southern Black Body, I aim to honor the power of unity, mutual submission, love, gentle care, church and spiritual force in the Black American community while acknowledging the cowardly, violent attacks that aim to dismantle it for selfish gain. Amidst the historical and present marginalization, my work explores the complexity, the fantasy, and the labor of belonging.

Wesley Chavis
(left) Medusa Laughing
Acrylic, plastic sheeting and scrims on canvas

(right top) Porous Painting (French Tips)
Mixed media with grouting sponge

(right bottom) Through and To Each Other
Acrylic and rubber scrim on wall
Seeking pleasure, absorbing pleasures, knowing the pain in seeking. The domestic space, the sites of eating, cleaning, of the mother, of labor, is the frame for the work in a context of a body. I transform the usage of tools. I source autobiographical experience to find images that reflect a way of looking and touching in the world with multiple sets of eyes, slits, lids and lips. My inquiry is centered around the construction of identity through objects and the assertion of woman’s pleasure.

Sarah Coote

*Love Learning*

*Licking the Back*
Acrylic, plastic sheeting and scrims on canvas
Installation View of Spooky Action at a Distance
Vinyl, fleece, LEDs, iron oxide, polymer
The question posed is “Can I experience remote human intimacy?” This is only posed after a network of computer code, images and entities have worked through the studio apparatus. These objects only materialize after khaos, the gap, the chasm has been recognized and a remote position has been realized. The work is about examining this constellation of objects and processes in their aspiration to answer the stated question in the affirmative. The resulting presentation is an experience of the failures and illuminations of both the material and the work.

Jon Rehwoildt
Ricardo Vicente Jose Ruiz
wake the devil
Watercolor on paper, wood, mixed media
Ricardo Vicente Jose Ruiz maintains a multi-disciplinary practice rooted in drawing that engages oral traditions grounded in *curanderismo*, Mexican faith healing. Through storytelling and superstition, Ricardo reflects on the everyday in a mode that accesses past, present, and future. Works, physical gestures via the artist’s body and sound initiate a conversation as to how healing manifests itself in the 21st century. Images explore metaphysical spaces of mythic figures and interactions grounded in personal memoir, ritual, and prose. The work intends to expand on the traumas of the difficult histories of marginalized groups within North America but provide a point of healing through spiritual reconciliation and mediation in its discussion.
(above) **Box Fan and Aloe** (detail)
Oil on canvas

(right top + bottom detail)
**Evening Corner (H&H)**
Oil on canvas
I’ve been making paintings of the intimate, domestic spaces of people who are close to me. The paintings grow out of our running dialogues and exchanges, our histories and trajectories. They depict bedrooms, kitchens, living rooms, desks, and dressers. They seek out and celebrate a cluttered and cacophonous intimacy. They articulate keys, cups, plants, computers, paintings, pens, shadows, movements, and absences with equal, non-hierarchical significance.

I try to paint in a way that articulates a sense of movement, interconnectivity, and slippage with regard to language and perception. I am interested in scaling up and inhabiting the moment of the shock of seeing; the fraction of a second during which the registration between sensation and language has not yet taken hold. Color and rhythm are deployed in ways that keep images from becoming too cohesive or legible. Some of these paintings can feel like accretion of interjections—pictures within pictures, frames within frames, rarely a dominant center, but a rhizome-like web of varying densities and intensities.

These paintings are usually simultaneously anxious and joyful, manic and celebratory. As much as these spaces can feel overwhelming or claustrophobic, they can also by turns be calm, absurd, playful, and comedic. I am interested in a form of painting where it may be difficult or impossible to say what is “happening,” because the thing that is happening is simply an imbuing of vitality into the mundane; finding, amplifying, and creating beauty without ignoring the complexity and anxiety of the time.

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(above) *Box Fan and Aloe* (detail)
Oil on canvas

Ryan Syrell
Una mujer pregunta por el origen de la imagen para ver si hay cabida para ella en esas manos.

A woman inquires about the image’s origin to see if there is room for her in those hands.

María Tinaut
Touch
Spray paint, toner print on newsprint paper
María Tinaut

My work focuses on the construction and validation of images assembled from fragments of found photographs, generating new narratives that hover between “reality” and fiction. I understand the family as a place of identity in continuous change, serving as a container of history and memory. Conceiving of my family albums as material allows me to approach my family history as a visitor. Mediated memory and constructed memory intertwine in the family album, a linear format that also inadvertently reveals gaps, both temporal and contextual. By understanding how photography’s authority constructs personal and family identity, I seek to undermine this authority, using photography’s “realness” against itself to create alternative narratives of within which I can belong.
PHOTOGRAPHY
+ FILM

Roxana Azar
Patrick Harkin
Desiree Dawn Kapler
Jiacheng Lily Xu
Katya Yakubov
Roxana Azar uses traditional portraiture and landscape photography that utilize contemporary photographic practices such as digital painting, cloning, and material studies. Influenced by science fiction, anxiety, plant intelligence, and historical gendering of the landscape, Plantoid imagines a sentient, genderless landscape as part of a Utopic, futuristic civilization.
Prime, Perform, Recover
Astroguard (resin-coated ballistic nylon), plywood, industrial siding, solar panels, solar generator, pigmented concrete, Gatorade, LED lightbulbs, LED smart tv, photographs, aluminum cans, ratchet straps, safety glass, fans, digital video, sound, oil drums
Growing up in suburban Florida, I am well acquainted with the seasonal need to try and hurricane-proof everything in my native state. Cycles of building, destruction, and rebuilding related to the natural elements, especially water and wind, are spotlighted in my work.

Many of the materials I work with are collected in the preparation and aftermath of hurricanes I have lived through, as well as in the wake of my own consumer habits. Use of consumer detritus, building materials, and allusions to natural disasters serve as powerful metaphors and entry points that open the work to the complex systems I strive to address.

My work addresses the ties between images, materiality, and consumerism in order to examine the human condition under image mediated culture. I explore the way in which images and objects can be read as material, spatial, and ideological models of the world. The presentation of my work involves a symbiotic grouping of sculpture, sound, architecture video and photographs that aims to extend the contemplation of disaster, not repress it. Since the shock of disaster marks the only time the real can pierce through the spectacle, the disaster deserves our attention. I utilize the aesthetics and rhetoric of disaster capitalism and prepping culture in order to pose direct questions about ecological and social change.

A feeling of impending doom and careful optimism is pervasive within the spaces I create. Each piece alludes to its own potential future functionality (or lack thereof), a do-it-yourself aesthetic, and the potential for harmony to arise out of dissonance.

Patrick Harkin
below the neck, above the knees
Super 8 film, video, found footage
below the neck, above the knees
is a short, personal narrative and
experimental film that explores the act
of violation in the context of trauma
and healing. Narration leads the viewer
through numerous events, connecting
stories into a larger understanding of
generational trauma and dysfunction.
These stories are told through
a feminist lens that emphasizes
vulnerability and healing. They invite
the viewer to absorb moments that
touch on body autonomy for the
sick and abused, Capitalism’s social
effects on the poor, and internalized
and inherited maternal lessons
from the women who are doing the
best that they can within limited life
circumstances. Visuals are scarred
and fragmented clips of super 8 film
and low-fi video. Repetitious black &
white imagery is penetrated by quick,
blue cuts that are fully realized only
at the end of the film. These visuals
are fragile and cyclic, mirroring the
emotions, relationships, and themes
of trauma within the stories.

This film is created in spite of the
definitions attempting to confine my
mother, the women before her, and
me. It is an act of resistance to who
and what is allowed to be seen or
heard. This film is my confession,
but it is not my confession alone.

Desiree Dawn Kapler
I used to wander around the demolition sites in Shanghai with a camera, spending all day looking for some material trace of the lives that once dwelled in the empty structures. Afterwards, I would stop by the farmers’ market on my way to the subway station. People who had been forced from their homes still managed to maintain some kind of living in between the ruins. The old lady who sold sweet rice cakes would always stuff extra in my bag. At that time, it didn’t occur to me that I would eventually shift my lens away from the structural ruins to those people who lived in between. They were not as exciting as the tiled floor with no walls, broken doors that lead to nowhere, and metal wires tangled under the sun.

There is a moment in a film by Edward Yang, a young boy in conversation with his father observes that he can’t see what his father sees and vice versa, prompting two questions: “How can I know what you see?” and “Can we only know half of the truth?” Unable to provide adequate answers, his father instead offers his son a camera. To me, half of the truth lies in the material remains of the past that mark our passage through time; the other half is in the fragile in-between spaces, where humans find a way to cope with loss and seek out ways to continue on with their lives.

Jiacheng Lily Xu
The Watering Room
HD video projection
The Watering Room is an experimental-narrative film that plays with the idea of the abject as a boundary phenomenon—a rejection of what is ‘other’ so as to stabilize a sense of self. Through vomit, shit, and tears, we eject the ‘other’, and secure our boundaries from what is threatening. The film questions what happens when that boundary fails, when it isn’t the world that is rendered uncanny and strange, but when what is abject continues to be what is within.

By complicating the pagan witch Baba Yaga with a contemporary feminist reading of the grotesque female body as a site of slipping boundaries and terrifying gender, the role of motherhood is brought into question as wholly defining a woman’s sexual identity. Through a carnivalesque celebration of the taboo and lewd, an enclosed single-room becomes an arena of psychological change.

Katya Yakubov
SCULPTURE + EXTENDED MEDIA

J. Avery Theodore Daisey
Elizabeth Hunter
Anthony Iacono
Hallie McNeill
Leyla Mozayen
John Christopher Orth
the moon cuts like pye, but not cherry
3 hour durational “live scenario”; another organisms (kombucha leather, kombucha, wild yeast, red and white clover, saurkraut, and mold)*

Live performers: Brianna Perry, Lindsay Parnell, Mo Nyamweya, Aki Vander Laan, Taylor Welch, Molly Rae Pearl

Cellists: Madison Erskine, Brit Lukens

*all other organisms are home-fermented, home-processed, dried, brewed, and/or grown by artist
Kneading(needling)

Per second starvation—> eating their ‘selves’ to fill their nother bellies

pulled at once from hanging bejeweled vessels,

pre-skins, as not yet

skinned to access the mobility they yearn for

Sopping up the last bit of yellow on our plate

sun-sighed

uncooked

Adjusting to the overactive-eating of the sun

; the culture has grown as shown on table L-S

murmur with soft lids squeezing the rapid growth between our toes

a piling,

injection of intersections, locking the not-yet

the could

in the transmogrified state of nother

pickling the intestines so they’re easier to digest

but while digesting the digestion they are dissecting an impression of the many before-wombs and pre-verbal states in their used-to-be’s and potent potentialities

; as the situational self (nother) establishes no ground, their yeaming suffocates in incomplete shadows. As dusk drips at the tip of digestion the situational self (nother) toils to un-earth a de-universalization/de-territorialization of discharge: as result.

exo-terra-established tyme

the nothers delineate in embody(ed) labor archives:

witnessing their ‘selves’ alongside self, shelved in decomposing becoming [4]

Slow-draw slippage
cuts rock,
pockets filled with sweat-wet skins

labored skins ingest teas, yeasts, kraut, ferments, molds

passed(past)

To the lefts left in pulley handshakes

[2] result of life denied of air

[3] divorcing of terra-established time/space orientation

[4] unbecoming
(left, top) *Pre-Body: Waiting Space* (installation)
HD monitor playing live feed of *Wiped Clean* (offsite installation), UV printed stainless plaques, cast aluminum and mixed media chairs

(bottom) *Wiped Clean* (off-site installation)
Linoleum tiles, live-feed camera, stainless steel + mixed media
Vestiges of my medical experiences live in glossy corridors. Wheels glide effortlessly through glazed hallways while an amorphous blob of flesh, sutures and wires is plopped in dark room, which holds only the glow of monitors pooling light on the waxed floor.

My thesis installation draws upon ubiquitous architectural norms of medical spaces that are lodged in a shared cultural understanding of the Clinical. The work speaks to the perverse paradox in the necessity for spaces that sterilize and neutralize some of our most personal and visceral encounters with our bodies.

Elizabeth Hunter

The installation takes place across four sites. The first site is in Church Hill, where I have created customized linoleum-tile floor that spans an empty residential living room. The floor butts up against the chalky, black fireplace and door moldings, creating a surrealist lens through which to view this medical architecture. The second site is in the Anderson Gallery, where waiting room benches take the form of extrusions of the tiled floor of the first site. The third and fourth spaces are less concrete, and exist somewhere in between: one in a monitor that shows a feed of the site in Church Hill, and lastly within the shared understanding and lived experiences of the viewers.
Racquet
Acrylic on cut and collaged paper

Glove
Acrylic on cut and collaged paper
My interdisciplinary studio practice has consisted of video, sculpture, photography, artist’s books, and most recently I’ve been focusing on image making through painted collages. The tight and controlled collage process helps inform the language in each picture. Through the recontextualization of quotidian objects with fetishistic play, fruit, plants, curtains and shrimp cocktails are reconfigured from their original functions to ones of physical pleasure and perversity. Caught in private moments of leisure and play, anonymous subjects are posed in theatrical scenarios that are heightened by a high-contrast palette and sharp graphic forms. These queer images are built from dark humor and absurdity. Tension is created in each psychological arrangement surrounding themes of control and desire.

Anthony Iacono

*Razor Blade*
Acrylic on cut and collaged paper
D is for the most cherished sense
(whence it comes and whither it goes)
4 Channel audio installation with seating (FGR, foam)
The piece is a sound installation which explores dialogic thinking, the multiplicity of the self, doubt, desire, and the tension between words and action, ideals and experience. It’s an attempt to reconcile the desire for optimism with tendencies toward cynicism while simultaneously thinking through the manifold meanings of the words revolution and revelation, and, moreover, the naïve and often misguided relationships we have to both. As an exploration of the conflictual relationship between bourgeois culture and progressive politics, it ventures to show how, despite our best intentions, we can be our own worst enemies.

Hallie McNeill
Your Turn, Doctor
Mixed media
Between incurably degenerative illness and the graffiti which ignited the Syrian Civil War, YOUR TURN, DOCTOR complicates hope. When myths of revolution, of wellness, no longer console—love as measured in anything but loss. Within a multidisciplinary project incorporating mosaics, nordic live action role-play techniques, and hoarding, both an increasingly painful embodiment and the material excess of capitalism is explored. Can objects function as a political demand, necessitating changes in the way the world is ordered? Who for?

To understand one kind of oppression in necessary sterility and another in marginalization so profound blindness can result. That is to ask, how long must one be told they do not see a thing they see before they don’t, before transgressions become norms? Who would know? An ophthalmologist turned dictator, or—for the duration of the installation, the artist will site-specifically offer vision therapy and eye exams. Between research and performance, and complicity and resistance, always.

Leyla Mozayen
Emporium
Video installation – multimedia
My work offers the urgency of human gesture against a backdrop of inevitable evanescence and mystery. My sculptural work fuses organic and inorganic materials to create a hybridized world of sensuous artifice, in which the bright orange of a tangerine and an extension cord share a complex root system. These pieces invite the viewer to imagine squeezing, smelling, stroking them, yet they maintain the formal reserve of the catalogued and preserved.

When these objects travel into the dreamscape of my video work, strapped to a waist or vibrating across a gold-mirrored surface, they are set adrift from linear time, although still subject to decay. But decay is but one participant here. In this procreant world, objects and object-bodies engage in mimicry, interchangeability and seduction. A shared visual language ripples across the surface of all participants, human and otherwise, a dialogue made manifest.

My thesis project is a video installation entitled Emporium in which I adorn, strap, tie, hang, and wrap the bodies of performers with my sculptures, and then let loose these composite bodies in the non-linear dream-time of cinema.
Cover Image
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